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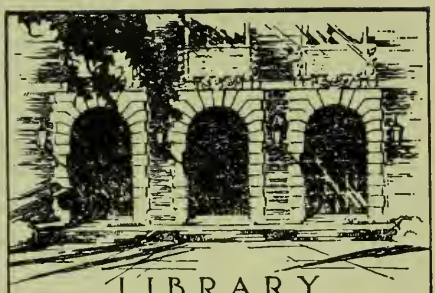

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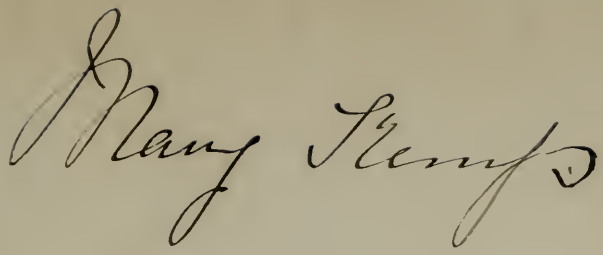

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THE
MAN WITH A SHADOW

BY

G. MANVILLE FENN,

AUTHOR OF "ONE MAID'S MISCHIEF," "THE MASTER OF THE CEREMONIES," "DOUBLE CUNNING," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE MAN WITH A SHADOW.

CHAPTER I.

THE CURATE GROWS SUSPICIOUS; AND TAKES HIS STICK.

"Do what, miss?" said Dally Watlock.

"That! There, you did it again."

"La, miss; I on'y thought my face might be a bit smudgy, and I wiped it."

"Don't tell me a falsehood, Dally. I know what it means. You felt guilty, and your face burned."

"La, miss; I don't know what you mean."

"Then I'll tell you, Dally. You are growing too light and free, and your conduct is far from becoming, or what it should be for a maid-servant at the Rectory. If girls are so foolish they must not be surprised at young

men—gentlemen—taking such liberties. Now go. And mind this: if it ever occurs again, I shall acquaint my brother."

"Well, I couldn't help it, miss. I didn't ask Mr. Tom Candlish to kiss me."

"Silence! How dare you? Leave the room."

"I was a-going to, miss. He popped out from behind the hedge just as Billy Wilkins had given me the letters, and he says, 'Give this note to Miss Leo, Dally,' he says, 'and mind no one else sees.'"

"I told you to leave the room, girl."

"Well, miss, I'm a-going, ain't I? And then, before I could help it, he put his arm round me and said my cheeks were like apples."

"Will—you—leave—the—room?"

"Yes, miss, of course I will; and then he kissed me just as Billy Wilkins looked back, and now he'll go and tell Joe Chegg, and he'll scold me too. I'm a miserable girl."

Red-cheeked, ruddy-lipped Dally Watlock — christened Delia as a compromise for Delilah — covered her round face with her

apron, and began to sob and try to pump up a few tears to her bright dark eyes, as her young mistress seized her by the shoulders, and literally forced her out of the room, when Dally went sobbing down the passage and through the baize door before she dropped her apron and began to laugh.

"She's as jealous as jel!" cried the girl. "It made her look quite yellow. Deal she's got to talk about, too. Tell master! She daren't! The minx! I could tell too. Who cares for her — tallow-face? Thinks she's precious good-looking; but she ain't everybody, after all. Master Joe Chegg, too, had better mind. I don't care if he does know now."

Then as if the spot burned, or as if a natural instinct taught her that the kiss imprinted upon her cheek was not as cleanly as it should have been, or as one of the honest salutes of the aforesaid Joe Chegg, Dally Watlock lifted her neat white apron, and wiped the place again.

"How dare he kiss her?" said Leo Salis, frowning, as she laid the post letters beside

her brother's place at the breakfast-table, and then stood with the note in her hand. "I'll punish him for this!"

She hastily tore open the note, which was written in a good, manly hand, but contained in ten lines four specimens of faulty spelling, and a "you was" which looked as big as a blot.

The note was brief and contained a pressing invitation to meet the writer in Red Cliff Wood that morning, as soon after breakfast as she could.

"I won't go," she said passionately. "I'll punish him!"

Then, as if feeling that she would punish herself, the girl stood thinking, and then hastily crushed the note in her hand and walked to the window, to be apparently studying the pretty Warwickshire landscape as her brother and sister entered the room.

"Morning, Leo, dear," said Mary Salis, the elder of the two; a fair English girl, gray-eyed, with high forehead and dark-brown, wavy hair, her type of countenance, allowing for feminine softness, being wonder-

fully like that of the robust, manly-looking clergyman who entered with his hand resting upon her shoulder.

"Morning, Mary," said Leo quietly; and her handsome dark, almost Spanish, features seemed perfectly calm and inanimate as she returned her sister's salute; and then, in a half weary way, rather distantly held up her cheek for her brother to kiss.

"Get out!" said the latter boisterously, as he caught the handsome girl by the shoulders, and tried to look in her eyes which avoided his. "No nonsense, Leo, my dear. No grumps. Give me a good, honest kiss. Lips—lips—lips."

She raised her face in obedience to the emphatic demand, and then extricated herself from the two strong hands, to take her place at the table; while her sister, who seemed nervous and anxious, and kept glancing from one to the other, went to the head of the table, and began to make the tea.

"You and I must not be on two sides, Leo, my dear," said the brother, smiling, but

with a troubled look on his face, which seemed the reflection of that in the eyes of the elder sister. "I'm like a grandfather to you, my darling, and what I say and advise is for the best."

"Do you wish to send me back to my room, Hartley?" said the girl, half rising.

"Name of a little fiddler in France, no!" cried Hartley Salis. "There—mum! I've done, dear. Breakfast! I'm as hungry as two curates this morning. What is it, Dally?"

"Ammonegs, sir," said the little maid, who entered with a covered dish.

"Didn't know Ammon ever laid 'em," muttered the curate, with a dry look at his sisters. "Now then: letters. Let me see."

He proceeded to open his letters, and read and partook of his breakfast at the same time, making comments the while for the benefit of his sisters, when he thought the news would please.

"Humph! May!" he said aloud; and then skimmed the ill-written, crabbed lines in silence.

"Hang him!" he said to himself. "What mischief-making wretch inspired that?" and he re-read the letter. "'Not becoming of the sister of a clergyman to be seen so often in the hunting-field—better be engaged over parish work—excites a good deal of remark—hope shall not have to make this painful allusion again'—Humph!"

The curate's face was full of the lines of perplexity, and rapidly doubling up the letter, he swallowed half a cup of tea at a gulp, much hotter than was good for him, and quite sufficiently so to cause pain.

"Phew! More milk, Mary, dear."

A long white hand raised the milk-jug quickly, and the earnest gray eyes which belonged sought the curate's as he held out his cup.

"Any bad news, Hartley, dear?"

"Bad news? No, no, dear, only one of May's old worries. The old boy's got gout again."

"Has he, dear?"

"Well, he doesn't say so, but it breathes in that style. He feels it his duty to stir

me up now and then, and he generally does it with a sharp stick."

He glanced as he spoke at Leo, who sipped her tea and read a novel, without apparently heeding what was going on.

"It's a great shame, Hartley, working so hard in the parish as you do," said Mary quietly; "while he——"

"Oh, silence! thou reviler of those in high clerical places," cried the curate merrily, as he inserted his knife in the envelope fold of another missive, and slit it open. "Here's a letter from North."

The face of Mary Salis was perfectly composed, but there was a flash from her eyes and an eager look of inquiry as the letter was opened.

"Ha! Busy as a bee! Conferences; lectures. Going to be present at a great operation. Nasty wretch! How he does glory in great operations!"

"It is his love of his profession," said Mary quietly.

"Too enthusiastic," said the curate. "Why doesn't he, a man with his income, make

himself happy by doing what good he can to his patients, and have his game of chess here when his work is done?"

"It is his desire to do good to his patients which makes him so earnest about scientific matters, dear," said Mary, smiling at her brother.

"Very kind of you to do battle for him, my child; but Horace North works far too hard, and he'll end by going mad."

"Or becoming one of the ornaments of his profession," said Mary, smiling.

"Ornaments be hanged! One of the useful corners, if you like."

"Does he say when he is coming home?" said Mary quietly.

"Yes; day after to-morrow. Good news for Mrs. Berens."

The curate burst into a hearty laugh, and a very, very faint flush of colour came into Mary's cheek.

"Saw her yesterday, and with a face as innocent of guile as could be she told me that she was very poorly, and should not feel safe to live long in a village where there

was no medical man. Glad old Horace is coming back, though. What have we here? Oh, I see. Letter about the horse—no, it's a mare."

Leo put down her book and listened attentively now.

"Hah! Yes! North was right. The fellow will take ten pounds less for her, after all."

"Ah!"

There was a faint sigh, expressive of gratification, and the curate looked up.

"Are you satisfied, Leo?" he said gravely.

"Yes."

"It goes against the grain," he said, laying his hand involuntarily upon the letter he had that morning received from the rector.

"Don't say that, Hartley," cried Leo, with her face now full of animation. "We can afford the horse, and it was absolutely disgraceful to appear on poor old Grey Joe."

"Grey Joe was a good safe horse, and I never felt nervous when you were mounted. Splendid fellow in harness too."

"Yes, admirable!" cried Leo. "And now

you can keep him always for the chaise. It will be so much better."

The curate shook his head.

"No," he said; "poor old Joe will have to go, and I wish him a good master."

"Poor old Joe!" said Mary, sighing, as she thought of many pleasant drives.

"Grey Joe! Go!" said Leo, with her lips apart. "Then what will you do for the chaise?"

"Use the new mare."

Leo looked at him with speechless indignation.

"Put the new mare in the chaise?" she faltered.

"Yes, my dear. The man says she goes well in harness."

"Oh, Hartley," cried Leo, flushing now with indignation, "that would be too absurd!"

"Why, my dear?"

"You get me a mount because it is so unpleasant to go to the meet on an old chaise-horse, and then talk of putting my hunter in the chaise."

"Grey Joe was not good enough for the purpose," said the curate gravely, "and at your earnest wish, my dear Leo, I have pinched in several ways that my sister, who is so fond of hunting, may not be ashamed before her friends."

"Pinched!"

"Yes, my dear, pinched myself and Mary. Our consols money only gives three per cent., and it is hard work to make both ends meet. You have your mount, and I cannot afford to keep two horses, so Grey Joe must go. We must have the use of a horse in the chaise, so the mare will have to run in harness sometimes."

Leo rose from her chair with her eyes flashing and cheek aflame.

"I declare it's insufferable," she cried, with a stamp of the foot. "Oh, I am so sick of this life of beggary and pinching! All through this season I have been disgraced by that wretched old horse, and now when people who know me—— Oh, I cannot bear to speak of it!"

"My dear sister!"

"It's cruel—it's abominable. If it had been Mary, she could have had what she pleased."

"My dear Leo," began Mary, looking up at her in a troubled way.

"Hold your tongue! You make mischief enough as it is. You always side with Hartley, who has no more feeling than a stone."

"But, my dear child," began the curate.

"Child! Yes; that's how you treat me —like a child. You check me in every way. I suppose you'll want to make me a nun, and keep me shut up always in this dreary hole. You check me in everything, and Mary helps you."

Mary looked up at her brother now, for he had slowly risen from his seat, and she knew the meaning of the stern aspect of his countenance.

"I had hoped, Leo," he said, "that you would have accepted my decision about that to which you have thought it wise to allude."

"I am driven to it," cried the girl passionately.

"No: I try to lead," said the curate, "as

a father might lead. I shall be sorry when the time comes for you to quit our pleasant old home, but if a good man and true comes and says, 'I love your sister; give her me to wife'——"

"If you cannot speak plain English, pray hold your tongue," cried Leo scornfully.

"I should hold out my hands to him, and greet him as a new brother, Leo," said the curate solemnly; "but when I find that my young, innocent sister is being made the toy of a worthless, degraded——"

"How dare you?" cried Leo, flashing out in her rage, while Mary went to her side, and laid her hand upon the trembling arm half raised.

"I dare," said the curate gravely, "because I have right upon my side. I think—and Mary joins me in so thinking——"

"Of course!" said Leo scornfully.

"That Thomas Candlish is no fit companion for my sister. I have told you so, and to cease all further communication. I have told him so; forbidden him the house; and he has accepted my judgment."

"Mr. Candlish is a gentleman," cried Leo fiercely.

"People call him so, and his brother by the same name, because of the old family property; but if they are gentlemen, thank Heaven I am a poor curate!"

"Your conduct——"

"Hush!" said the curate firmly. "We will say no more about this, Leo, my dear. You are angry without cause. I have acceded to your request for a fresh horse, so as to indulge you in your love of hunting, and at more cost than you imagine. I shall always be glad to do anything that I can to make my sisters happy; but I must be judge and master here, though I fear I am often very weak."

"It is insufferable," cried Leo indignantly; and she raised quite a little whirlwind as she swept out of the room.

The curate sighed, and sank back in his chair with his brow knit, till he felt a soft arm encircle his neck and a rounded cheek rest against his temple.

"Ah!" he exclaimed; "that's better;"

and he passed his arm round the graceful form. "This is very sad, Mary. But, there; we will not brood over it; difficulties often settle themselves."

"Yes, Hartley."

"But that Candlish business must not go on."

"No, Hartley. It is impossible."

She kissed his forehead, and the breakfast was finished in silence — supposed to be finished. It had really ended when Leo Salis quitted the room.

It was about an hour later that as the Reverend Hartley Salis was hard at work over his sermon, striving his best to keep out college lore, and to write in language that the Duke's Hampton villagers could easily understand, that he came to the sentence following—

"Now a man's duty, my friends—and a woman's"—he added parenthetically.

"Now, what shall I tell them a man's duty is—and a woman's?"

That required thought, and he laid down his pen, rose, and walked to the study

window, to look out on the pleasant landscape; beautiful still, though not in the most goodly time of year.

"Obedience!" he cried angrily, for just passing out of the little rustic gate at the bottom of the Rectory grounds he saw his sister Leo.

She was in hat and cloak. Her movements were rapid, and the furtive look she darted back told tales.

"No," said the curate; "it would be spying. I cannot."

"It is your duty," something seemed to whisper to him.

"Perhaps I am contemptibly mean and suspicious," he muttered. "I hope I am. If it is so, I'll—— No, no, no, Hartley, my son! Recollect what you are. Such as the bishop should be, such must you be — no brawler — no striker. No: it must be a favourable opportunity for a quiet chat with Leo, for we cannot go on like this, poor child."

He went into the hall, took down his hat, reached a stout cudgel-like stick which his

hand gripped firmly, as his nerves tingled, while his left hand clenched, and felt as if it were grasping some one by the collar.

"A scoundrel!" he muttered.

"Going out, dear?"

"Ah, Mary! You there? You go about like a mouse. Yes, I've just got to 'a man's duty is' in my sermon, and can't get any farther, so I'll go as far as Red Cliff Wood and back for a refresher."

He nodded and went out.

"Poor Mary!" he muttered; "she must not know; but if I had stayed a minute longer she would have found me out. Now, Master Tom Candlish, if you are there, I'll——"

He gave himself a sharp slap on the mouth.

"Steady! Man, man, man! how you do forget your cloth! But if Tom Candlish—— Pish! Steady, man! Let's go and see."

Mary Salis stood in the deep old mullioned window, gazing after him.

"Hartley never leaves and speaks like that unless there is something wrong," she

said to herself. "If that wretched man has persuaded Leo—she has just gone out—without a word. Oh, no, no! she would not do such a thing as that. How I do picture troubles where there are none!"

She stood watching until her brother disappeared, and then went back into the dining-room, telling herself that it was folly, but her heart refused to be convinced, and set up a low, heavy, ominous throb.

CHAPTER II.

DR. NORTH GETS IN HOT WATER.

"YAH!"

A virtuous mob's war-cry. The favourite ejaculation of the unwashed scoundrels who are always ready to redress grievances and hunt down their fellow-creatures for the crimes they glory in themselves—when they can commit them safely.

There is always a large floating contingent ready for this duty, and also—to use their own expression—"to have a go at anythink;" and upon several occasions they had had "a go" at the lecture-room of St. Sector's Hospital, Florsbury, the consequence of such "goes" being that the neighbouring glaziers had a large job; but the authorities preferred

to content themselves with keeping out the wind and water, and left the exterior unpainted, showing the stone dents, chipped paint, and batterings of the insensate crew of virtuous beings who revel in destruction whenever they have a chance.

The "Yahoos" had their own theory about St. Sector's, and allowed themselves to smoulder for a time, but every now and then they burst forth into eruption, and then the consequences were not pleasant to behold.

Lecture night at St. Sector's, and a goodly gathering present to witness an operation performed by one of the greatest surgical *savans* of the day. There were medical students present, but some of the cleverest surgeons of London and the country had made a point of being there to see the operation and learn how to combat a terrible disease which, up to that date, had been considered certain death to the unfortunate being who contracted that ill.

The old *savant* had thought, had experimented, and had given years of his life to studying that evil, and now, having pro-

claimed the result of his discoveries, and coming as the announcement did from a man of such weight in the profession, a strong band of the lights of surgical science had gathered together to witness the experiment; and also hear a paper read by a young surgeon from the country — Dr. Horace North.

Precedence was given to the paper, and a keen, intelligent, handsome young man of thirty stepped up to the lecturer's table with a roll of papers in his hand. He looked rather pale, and there was a slight twitching at the corners of his lips as he bowed to his audience, after a few words of introduction from the gray-haired chairman of the evening. Then the buzz of conversation, which had ceased for a few moments, began again.

He felt that he had a task before him, that of stopping a gap in front of which an eager crowd were ready to clamour for the treat they had come to hear. Dr. Horace North was nothing to them, and the young students voted his paper a bore.

He began to read in a calm, clear voice,

expounding his views, and the buzz of voices increased as first one and then another page was read and turned over, scarcely a word being heard.

He stopped and poured out a glass of water, and the carafe was heard to clatter against the glass as the lecturer's hand trembled.

This was the signal for a titter, which was repeated by some thoughtless student, as the reading was resumed without the water being tasted.

Then five minutes of painful reading ensued, with the buzz of voices increasing.

There was a sudden stoppage, and all were attentive.

For, with an angry gesture, the young doctor rolled up his papers, threw them aside, and took a step forward.

"Gentlemen," he cried, in a voice which rang through the theatre, "I am addressing you who in the conceit of youth believe that there is little more to learn, and who have treated my reading with such contempt."

"Hear, hear!" cried the old chairman.

Those two encouraging words touched the speaker, and, with a dramatic earnestness of manner, he exclaimed :

"I have not much to say, but it is the result of years of study, and that you shall hear."

Then, for the space of half-an-hour, in fluent, forcible language, he poured forth the result of his observations and belief that they, the followers of the noble science of surgery, had a great discovery before them waiting to be made, one which it was the duty of all to endeavour to drag forth from the dark depths in which Nature hid away her treasures.

He declared that death should only follow upon old age, when the fruit was quite ripe, and ready to fall from the tree of life. He left it to the followers of medicine to attack and conquer disease, so that plague and pestilence should no longer carry off their hecatombs of victims, and addressed the surgeon alone, telling him that in case of accident or after operation, no man of health or vigour should be allowed to die.

There was a half laugh here, and a sneer or two.

"I repeat it," cried the speaker. "No such man should be allowed to die." Previous to his accident he was in robust health, and his apparent death was only, as it were, a trance, into which he fell while Nature busily commenced her work of restoration, the building up again of the injured tissues. How the sustaining of the patient while Nature worked her cure was to be carried out, it was the duty of them all to discover, and for one he vowed that he would not rest till the discovery was made.

In the case of drowning it was often but suspended animation. In the case of accident and apparent death, it would be the same. Death by shock, he maintained, was a blot upon the science of the present day. Those who died by shock merely slept. Such body was in full health and vigour, and Nature would repair all damages by the aid of man; and he was convinced that the time would come when surgeons would save a hundred lives where they now saved one.

The speaker sat down amidst a whirlwind of applause, for his manner, his thorough belief, and his earnestness carried away his audience; and the result would have been a most exciting discussion but for the intervention of the chairman, who pointed to the clock, and at once introduced the great surgeon, while a murmur ran through the theatre as a large table was wheeled into the centre of the building from behind a curtain, and those present knew what the draping of the table concealed.

A burst of applause greeted the grave, gray-headed surgeon; and as it ceased, he expressed, in a few well-selected words, the pleasure he had felt in listening to Dr. Horace North, to whose theory he expressed himself ready to pin his faith.

"And I say this, gentlemen, for the reason that I am here to-night—to point out to you how great a stride can be made in surgery—how much we have yet to learn."

Then, explaining in a calm, clear voice as he went on, he turned back his sleeves, and selected a long, keen blade from a velvet-

lined case, signed to his assistants, and the subject upon which he was to operate lay there grim, cold, and ghastly.

No: not ghastly to the earnest men who saw in it the martyr immolated to the saving of thousands, as, with deft fingers and unerring skill, the great surgeon made his incisions; and exemplifying step by step each act and its reasons, he performed his wonderful experiment to the last stroke; and then, having finished, was about to draw back when there was a volley of stones upon door and window, and, amid the creaking of woodwork and the tinkling of falling glass, came the yelling of the virtuous mob—

"Yah!"

And directly afterwards—

"Body-snatchers! Yah!"

For a moment there was a stillness, as if the audience in the lecture theatre had been paralysed; then there was a general stampede towards the door, and a burst of rage, excitement, and dread, as a voice loudly announced that the mob had scaled the wall and were in the yard—a tremendous

volley of stones and brickbats endorsing the announcement.

For a few minutes only one present seemed to keep his head, and that was the old operator, who whispered a few orders to his assistants, and with rapid action the table, with its burden, was draped and wheeled beyond the curtained arch from which it had been drawn, the banging of a heavy door and the shooting of bolts following directly after.

The beating of heavy sticks upon the doors, the smashing in of the windows, glass and wire-work giving way at every volley, and the yelling of the mob, made a deafening uproar, during which the old surgeon calmly began returning his favourite operating knives to their purple velvet-lined cases, locking them up carefully, as he turned to Horace North, who stood beside him, and said, with a smile:

"Now what have we done to deserve such treatment as this?"

"Yah! Body-snatchers!" came with a burst of yells from without.

"Done, sir?" said the young doctor, flushing. "Toiled hard to discover means of alleviating pain and saving life. This is our reward."

"Yes," said the old man, smiling, as he patted his cases. "My pets; I shouldn't like to lose them. Yes, sir, ignorance in Christian England in the nineteenth century!"

"Yah! Body-snatchers!" came again; and the howling and yelling mob were evidently forcing their way in.

"Never mind them, Mr. North," continued the old man. "Let me see and hear from you. I believe in your theory. You have gone too far, my dear sir; youth is sanguine. You have aimed at the top of the mountain. You will not get there, but to a good high place, and I am proud to have met so clever, so talented a young man."

"Thank you, sir; thank you," cried North, as the old man lowered his cases into his pockets; "but hadn't we better try and get away?"

"Try?" said the old man. "I do not see

how we can. The mob are arranging for seizing by escalade."

"Yah! Body-snatchers!" came in a fierce yell, louder, too, as it followed upon a tremendous crash.

The irruption of the London "Yahoos" had taken place, and they were pouring in, headed by a fierce-looking, crop-eared, bullet-headed ruffian, and the fight began.

Medical students can fight; and upon this occasion they used their fists scientifically and well; but the odds were against them. The mob swept on, and the big ruffian and a dozen companions made a dash over the seats, treating them as they would those of the gallery of a theatre on a night when they wished to express their displeasure.

Before Horace North realised the fact, they were upon the group by where the operating table had stood, and close to another table upon which were bottles, glasses, basins, sponges, and a pestle and mortar.

The young doctor was borne back as the yell—the war-cry, "Yah! Body-snatchers!"—once more arose, and as he struggled with

one scoundrel who tried to take vengeance upon him by stealing his watch, he saw the gray-headed old surgeon struck down by the bullet-headed, butcher-like ruffian who led the gang; and the fellow was about to follow up his attack by performing a war-dance upon the defenceless old man.

He had not time, for Horace North literally flung himself upon the savage and drove him from his prey, but only to be grasped in turn by one whose greatest pleasure was destruction, and whose unpleasant mouth expanded into a satisfied grin as he bore back the body of his weaker adversary, and with it a good deal of the future of Mary and Leo Salis linked in with that of half the village of Duke's Hampton.

"Ah, would yer! it's my turn now."

The vengeance of his class against what he called a "swell."

CHAPTER III.

SCIENCE AT WORK.

Horace North was more of the student than the athlete, and he felt the blood rushing to his head — a strange sensation of vertigo which he could have aptly described in writing, and thoroughly expressed, with all due detail, the action going on by the compression of certain veins and an artery. But for a few moments, in the *mêlée*, he could do nothing to free himself of the savage grip, which threatened to injure him for life, if it did not quite destroy.

But science is a fine backer of brute force. A man with little muscle is the equal of a giant when both are armed with sword or pistol; and could Horace North have brought

his science to bear in the shape of galvanism or some anæsthetic, he would have had the burly giant at his mercy instead of rapidly losing his senses.

Galvanism was, however, not at hand, the opportunity to administer a dose of ether or chloroform was also wanting, and as one of the young doctor's hands vainly grasped the ruffian's sinewy wrist, the other fell nearly nerveless upon the table against which he was borne.

Here, fortunately, he found the much-needed help of science in the shape of a pestle of marble comfortably reposing in its native mortar.

Horace North had often used a pestle in peace; he now used it in war, for his fingers closed upon the wooden handle, the heavy weapon described the arc of a circle, there was a sounding rap, half an oath—barely that—and the big ruffian fell all in a heap upon the floor.

For a few moments Horace North felt dazed, but the fighting instinct of the man was now roused, and as a couple of the

leader's friends came at him to avenge their comrade's fall, one uttered a yell as the pestle was dashed in his face, and the other a howl as it came down with a crack upon his collar-bone, both being rendered *hors de combat*, while the doctor now bestrode the prostrate body of the old surgeon, and kept the rest at bay.

Just at this time there was a burst of cheering, for the students were warming to the fray and fighting shoulder to shoulder. The mob, disheartened by their leader's fall, began to give way. The atmosphere of the lecture-hall was evidently too warm, and their retrograde movement rapidly became a rout, in which they were swept bodily out of the place by door and window, too much governed by the laws of self-preservation to think even of those who were down.

Then, as the last scoundrel was driven out, and a tremendous cheer arose from the victors, a strong body of police marched into the hall, well buttoned up and beautifully cool, to find that the work was done—all save that of

marching off half-a-dozen dizzy, unwashed savages to the cooling cell.

"Better, sir?"

"Eh? Better? Yes—a little contused. Water! Thank you. Yes; better now. Rather rough proceedings."

The old man looked round rather piteously, till his eyes lighted upon the young doctor.

"Ah! you, Mr. North. I remember now. Thank you. Would you mind helping me to my carriage? I'm rather giddy."

The task was done; the old man being helped to the hospital, and through it to a private entrance, where his carriage was in attendance, away from the crowd.

"That's right. Come home with me, Mr. North. I should like a few words with you, if you would not mind."

Horace North gladly entered the carriage, for he thought the old man not fit to go alone, and in the excitement at the hospital no one paid him the slightest attention.

"Now come to my room," said the old man, as they were set down at his residence

in Harley Street. "Hurt? Oh, no!—a trifle. I want to talk to you about your plans. We'll have a cup of coffee, a cigar, and a chat."

That chat in the great surgeon's study lasted till daybreak, and then Horace North walked back to his hotel with his brain on fire. For, with his ideas to a certain extent endorsed by the great authority he had just quitted, he saw himself on the eve of a grand discovery, one which should immortalise his name and benefit his fellow-creatures to a vast extent.

"It is like taking a plunge into the unknown," he cried, as he walked hurriedly on, excited beyond measure. For Horace North was like the rest of the world—blind as to what would happen. Had he been otherwise, he would have buried his secret thoughts for ever sooner than have faced that which was to come.

CHAPTER IV.

PARSON SALIS TAKES OFF HIS COAT.

Mary Salis was wrong, for her headstrong, passionate sister was ready to do whatever she pleased, and what pleased her then was to obey the summons contained in the note Dally Watlock delivered to her that morning.

Her brother's face grew stern and hard as he walked on, to see from time to time small footprints in the soft track, for a southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaimed it a hunting morning. No dry wind had hardened the path, and Hartley Salis felt convinced that he knew his sister's goal.

In half-an-hour he reached Red Cliff Wood, the great patch of ancient oaks on

the Candlish estate through which the best trout-stream in the shire — the one which flowed through the Rectory meadows and down at the bottom of the Manor House garden—meandered.

His path was along by the stream, which here and there showed upon its bank the same traces of a pair of little feet, whose high-heeled boots left deep imprints; and Hartley Salis grew more stern as he walked on toward the depths of the wood, where the great mass of ruddy stone cropped out to give its name to the place, and form, as it overhung the stream, a glorious fernery, ever moist with the water that oozed from the strata from foot to top.

A dozen yards farther and there was a low whinnying noise, which came from a handsome sorrel hunter, secured by the bridle to a ragged old oak bough.

Not an unpleasant picture in that glorious old mossy wood, but sufficient to make Hartley Salis set his teeth, grip his stick tightly, and stride rapidly on to a green path a little farther away, where another

picture met his gaze—to wit, his sister Leo with her back to him, and that back encircled by a broad scarlet band, which, on closer inspection, took the form of the arm of a well-built man in hunting-coat and top-boots.

Hartley Salis walked swiftly toward the group, the soft, mossy ground silencing his approach, till he trod upon a piece of rotten branch, which broke with a loud crack.

The couple started apart and turned to face the intruder, when Leo uttered a gasp of mingled shame and anger, and staggered back against a tree, leaving her brother face to face with Tom Candlish of the Hall.

For a few moments neither spoke, and then as the young man in scarlet got over his surprise, he half closed his dark eyes, and a mocking smile curved his lip.

"So it has come to this," said the curate at last, speaking in a low voice full of suppressed anger.

"Hallo, parson! You here? Coming to the meet?" said the young man, half mockingly.

"After what has passed between us——"

"Oh, come, that'll do," cried the young man insolently. "Do you suppose you have a right to begin preaching at me every time you see me?"

"Do you suppose, sir," cried the curate, still mastering his anger, "that you, because your father was the great land-holder here, have a right to persevere with what I have expressly forbidden?"

"Confound your insolence, sir! Don't speak to me like that. What the deuce do you mean?"

"What do I mean, sir? I mean this—and I beg that you will not adopt that bullying tone toward me."

"Bullying tone! You shall find something else besides a bullying tone if you interfere with me;" and as the young man spoke he gave his hunting-whip a flourish.

The curate's cheeks flushed, and his brow contracted with anger; but he maintained his calmness as he continued:

"You asked me what I mean. I mean this: I, as their elder brother, and a clergy-

man of the Church of England, occupy the post of guardian to my two orphan sisters. They are happy in their life with me at the old Rectory, and I naturally look with serious eyes at the man who tries to tamper with that happiness. I should feel troubled if a gentleman came to the house in a straightforward, honourable way, and said to me, 'Sir, I love one of your sisters; I ask your permission to visit at your house; give sanction to the engagement;' but when——"

"Oh, if you are going to preach, I'm off. Finish it on Sunday."

The curate's colour grew deeper as he stepped before the young man, and stopped his departure.

"I am not going to preach, sir; but I am going to make you hear what I have to say."

"Make?"

"Yes, sir, make, in spite of your insults. You are the brother of the chief man in this village, and I am only the curate; but you are to a certain extent under me; and now you have driven me to it, I am, I repeat, going to make you hear what I have to say."

"Oh, are you?" mockingly.

"Yes. I say, when instead of approaching my sister in an honourable way, a man who is noted for his blackguardly conduct toward more than one poor girl in this village——"

"Look here, parson, is this meant as an insult?"

——"Comes to my house, and is requested to cease his visits, and then lays siege to the affections of one of my sisters in a cowardly, contemptible, clandestine fashion, I say, that man is unworthy of the treatment I should accord to a gentleman, and calls for that which I would give to some low-lived cad."

"Here, I say," cried Tom Candlish fiercely; 'do you mean to tell me I am not your sister's equal?"

"I tell you, sir, that no one who makes himself the associate of betting men, race-course touts, and low-lived jockeys is the equal of the lady you have named, while one who, in opposition to my wishes, insists upon writing to the weak, foolish girl, and

persuades her to meet him as you have done, merits a sound castigation."

"Once more, do you mean to tell me, I am not your sister's equal?"

"I do; and no amount of repentance, sir, for your ill-deeds would make you so."

"Look here!" cried the young fellow, "you've been talking to me like a man sometimes, and then you've been dodging into your clerical jargon again. I've listened to you pretty patiently, and have borne more than I should from any one else because you are a parson; but you've gone too far, and now it's my turn. If Leo——"

"Miss Leonora Salis, sir."

"If Leo tells me she won't have any more to say to me, I shall go; but as for you—hark here. I shall write to her, I shall meet her, and I shall ask her to meet me just as often as I please. Not her equal, I! Why, you miserable, beggarly, hundred-a-year, threadbare curate, how dare you address me as you do? Do you know who I am?"

"Yes: Tom Candlish, brother of Sir Luke Candlish, of Candlish Hall."

"Yes, sir, descendants of one of our finest English families."

"Descendants, sir," retorted the curate, "of a miserly, money-spinning old scoundrel, who gave impecunious James I. so many hundred pounds for a contemptible baronetcy, which has come down to one of as disgraceful a pair as ever sat like a blight upon a pleasant English village."

"You insolent hound!" roared Tom Candlish; "I'll ride over to May and have you kicked out of your curacy."

"Do," said the curate.

"No, I won't, for Leo's sake. But, look here, master parson, don't you interfere with me, or, by God, sir! I'll give you the most cursed horsewhipping I ever gave man in my life. By George! if it wasn't for your white neck-cloth and black coat, hang me, I'd do it now."

He extended one hand, as if to grasp the curate's collar, and raised his hunting-whip menacingly; but in an instant it was whisked out of his hand, and sent flying.

"You object to my white tie and black

coat, eh, Tom Candlish?" said the curate, rapidly throwing them off and across a neighbouring oak branch; "there, then, for the time being they shall not afflict your eyes or put me out of your reach. Now then, we are on equal terms. Strip off that scarlet coat, you miserable popinjay."

"What do you mean?" cried Tom Candlish, turning mottled in the face.

"I mean, sir, that words are no use to such a scoundrel as you: that a curate is also a man. In this case he is the lady's brother, and in addition there are a score of insults to wipe away. Take off your coat."

"What!" cried Tom Candlish, with a sneering laugh. "Look here—do you know that I can fight?"

"I know you were in a blackguardly prize-fight, sir, in a ring where your opponent was a sort of champion of the Bilston colliers."

"Yes, so put on your coat and go home while you're safe."

"And I know that I have not clenched my fist in anger, sir, since I left Oxford,

twelve years ago; but if you had beaten Tom Sayers it would not move me now. One of us two does not leave this wood without a sound thrashing, and, please goodness, that's going to be you."

The Reverend Hartley Salis, M.A., rapidly rolled up his shirt-sleeves over his white arms; while it was observable that the nearly new scarlet hunting-coat worn by handsome Tom Candlish, of Candlish Hall, came off very slowly, possibly on account of its excellent fit.

CHAPTER V.

THE DOCTOR'S PATIENTS WANT HIM AT HOME.

"Ah! Horace, old man, back again?"

"Yes. I should have come on sooner, but I—— Hallo! gloves! Why, what's the matter with your hands?"

"Oh! nothing. Rubbed the skin off my knuckles. That's all."

"Humph!" said the curate's visitor—Horace North; and there was a curious twinkle in his eyes. "I say, I should have been over sooner, but I found a letter from Luke Candlish, asking me to go across to the Hall, as his brother was unwell."

"Oh!" said the curate quietly.

"Went over and found the squire nearly drunk. He's killing himself fast."

"They're a nice pair," said the curate grimly.

"More shame for you to say so," cried North. "They're your moral patients. You ought to improve them."

"Yes," said the curate drily.

"The squire was sober enough, though, to tell me that his brother had had a nasty accident—was going to the meet yesterday, when his horse bolted with him, and somehow raced off into Red Cliff Wood, where Tom was only able to check him right up at the top there, where the beast threw him and he fell crashing down from the top of the cliff to the bottom."

"Into the stream?" said the curate quietly.

"No; I didn't hear anything about the stream," said the doctor. "I went up and found him swearing at one of the maids because she was putting a poultice on his right eye too hot. Then he began to swear at me for not coming sooner. That raised my dander, and I told him I'd give him a dose that would keep him in bed for a month if he wasn't civil."

"Yes?"

"Well, then he cooled down and sent the maid away."

"Yes?"

"And I went to work. He has had one of the most curious falls I ever met with in practice. His eyes are closed up—beautiful pair of black eyes; lip cut; right canine tooth in upper jaw broken short off; several contusions on the lower jaw; rib broken; and the skin off his knuckles.—Been doing anything to your bees?"

"Bees? What, this time of year? No. Why?"

"Cheek looks a little puffy. Curious fall that of Tom Candlish. Looked more like having been in another prize-fight. Let me see your knuckles."

"No; they're all right. Don't humbug, Horace, old man. You've guessed it. I gave him a most awful thrashing."

"Bless you, my son!" cried the doctor, clapping him on the shoulder.

"And I feel miserable at having disgraced myself so."

"Nonsense! Church militant. Thrashed a confounded scoundrel. But what for? He has never had the insolence to—— ?"

He gave his head a short nod towards the drawing-room.

"Yes, and—— There, I caught them together. He has been sending notes to her to meet him. I was in a passion, and he insulted me; and—and——"

"You pitched into the scoundrel, and you've given him the loveliest thrashing a man ever deserved. My dear Salis, you've done one of the grandest deeds of your life."

"I'm a clergyman, and I've behaved like a blackguard."

"Nonsense! There's only one drawback to what you have done."

"What's that?"

"Did it when I was not there to see the fun. Why, it's glorious."

"I shall never forgive myself."

"Then I'll forgive you. Why, you soft-hearted old parson, you know you cannot touch him and his rascal of a brother with

words, and you know that they are the curses of the neighbourhood."

"No reason for me to give way to temper, and degrade myself."

"Degrade your grandmother, sir! You've treated them as the Irish priests treat their flocks. Metaphorically given Tom Candlish the stick. It was your duty, sir, and there's an end of it."

"No; I'm afraid there's not an end to it. He threatens to go to May."

"Bah!"

"And to lay my conduct before the bishop."

"And goes to bed and pretends his horse threw him. Get out, you old humbug; you'll never hear another word."

"I, who wish to live at peace with all men, have made a deadly enemy."

"Pooh! He's a wind-bag. You've taken the right course, and nipped that affair in the bud. Does Leo know of it?"

"Yes."

"And Mary?"

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"Not a word, so be careful—hist! some one coming."

"May I come in?" said a sweet, musical voice.

"Come in? Yes," said the young doctor, leaping up to throw open the door, and greet Mary Salis with a frank smile and so hearty a shake of the hand that she had hard work not to wince. "There, don't come nearer; I smell of London smoke and blacks. Thank goodness, I'm back home."

"The place does not seem the same without you," said Mary, going behind her brother's chair, to stand with her hands resting upon his shoulders.

"I don't know about the place, but I know I do not feel the same out of it. Must go sometimes, though, to pick up a few facts, or one would be left behind. Did you go to the house?"

"Yes, and found Mrs. Milt very busy."

"Bless her! Nice game she has had, Salis. General clear up, and my study turned upside down. Seen old Moredock?"

"Yes, went yesterday," said the curate.

"The old man was lying down, and fretting because you were away. Said he knew he should die before you returned."

"Stuff. He'll live to a hundred; but I'll go and see the old boy. There, now you're laughing," he said, turning to Mary; "now, don't say Mrs. Berens has been ill and wanted me."

"Why not?" said Mary, with her pleasant face lighting up, and a slight flush coming into her soft cheeks. "I told you the place did not seem the same without you."

"Mrs. Berens met me twice, and sighed large sighs," said the curate, laughing. "Hah! I wish they'd all be as anxious about their souls as they are about their bodies."

"And they're not, old fellow?" said the doctor.

"No. I begin to wish you were out of the place, North, for you are my hated rival."

"Hartley!" said Mary reprovingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the doctor. "Jealous. Never mind, old fellow. It'll all come right in the end. There, can't stop. I've no end to do."

"But how did you get on in London?"

"Splendidly. Horribly. No end of adventures. Tell you all about it when I come again. Must see patients now. Must wind up old Moredock, and set him going again, or no bells, no clock, and no 'Amens' on Sunday."

"Well, we could do without the last," said the curate, smiling. "Going to see Mrs. Berens?"

The doctor made a comical grimace.

"Must," he said; "but, 'pon my word, I always feel ashamed to charge for my visits. She's as well as you are, Miss Salis."

"But she's always better when you've been to feel her pulse," said the curate, laughing.

"Get out!" cried the doctor merrily.

"I say, North, don't be shabby."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't slip off, and be married in London. Have it here, and let me get my fees."

"Now, beware," said the doctor, shaking his fist playfully. "I never have slain a

man wilfully; but if you tempt me there's no knowing what I may do when I have you stretched helpless in bed."

"I defy you," cried the curate, laughing. "See how guilty he looks, Mary."

"Hartley!" said Mary reprovingly, and she pressed his shoulder.

"Now that proves it," said the doctor. "Go to, thou miserable impostor! Have I not seen the fair, plump, sweet widow smiling softly on thee? Have not I heard her sigh over her soup when you have been laying down the law at dinner?"

"Nonsense, nonsense!" said the curate, frowning.

"And have I not seen her look grave when you came to *firstly* in your Sunday sermon; take out her scent-bottle at *secondly;* lean back in rapt adoration at *thirdly;* and when it got to *ninthly* begin to shed tears, shake her head softly, and look as if she were mentally saying, 'Oh, what a sermon we have had.'"

"I say, North, don't banter," said the curate, with a half-vexed expression.

"Why, you hit me first. Didn't he, Miss Salis?"

Mary nodded.

"There, sir. Judged by our fair Portia herself. But I must go. Good-bye, old fellow. Chess to-night?"

"By all means," said the curate.

"Here or there?"

"Oh, come on here," cried the curate; and, with a kindly message for Leo and a hearty shake of the hand to each, the doctor hurried away.

"I am glad he's back," said the curate seriously. "Aren't you, Mary?"

"Very," she replied. "We miss our friends."

"Yes, and he is a good old fellow as ever stepped; so frank, so manly, and straightforward. I don't know what the poor people here would do if he were to leave."

"You don't think he will leave?" said Mary anxiously.

"Leave? Not he. He likes his old home too well. I say, though, seriously, dear, you don't think he cares for Mrs. Berens?"

"Oh, no, Hartley," said Mary, with a confident smile. "I am sure he thinks of nothing but his profession."

"Exactly. I often think the same, but I often wish something."

"What, dear?" said Mary earnestly.

"That he had taken a fancy to Leo. It would have been a happy day for me to have seen her with such a protector for life."

"Yes," said Mary softly. "He is a true gentleman at heart."

"Why, Mary," cried the curate enthusiastically, "he never takes a penny of any of the poor folk, and he works for them like a slave. The nights I've known him pass at a sick bedside. Well, thank God, we have such a man here."

"Amen," said Mary softly.

"There's Leo," said the curate, as she was seen to pass down one of the paths of the garden. "Mary, my child, if that could be brought about, it would be her saving, and make me a happy man."

Mary rested her hands more firmly upon

her brother's shoulder, and turned to watch her sister; and, as she did so, her sweet, pensive face grew more grave and her brother's was averted, so that he could not read its secret, neither did he hear the sigh that softly rose as her eyes were suffused with tears.

CHAPTER VI.

DR. NORTH VISITS THE SEXTON.

"Nonsense, Hartley, she is as quiet as a lamb."

"I'm not so sure of that," said the curate, who looked rather anxiously at a handsome, weedy gray cob just led round to the front.

His sisters were standing ready to go and make a call, and his brow wrinkled a little as he noted a peculiar fidgety expression about the mare's ears.

"Why, Hartley, how foolish you are!" cried Leo. "You stop indoors reading till you are as nervous as Mrs. Berens."

"Eh? Yes. Well, I suppose I am," said the curate good-humouredly. "But be care-

ful; I'm always a little uncomfortable about strange mares. Will you have an extra rein?"

"Absurd!" said Leo. "There, you shall be humoured. Tell him to buckle it lower down."

The girl looked very handsome and animated, and, since the scene in the wood with Tom Candlish, had been so penitent and patient that her brother had shrunk from checking her in any way.

The mare had duly arrived, and, apparently bending to her brother's will, Leo had patiently seen it put in harness—degraded, as she called it—and as it went very well they were going on the present morning drive.

Hartley Salis tried to hide his anxiety, and turned to chat with Mary, who looked rather pale—the consequence of a headache, as she said; and as he talked he felt more and more between the horns of a dilemma.

Mary did not want to go, he knew. He did not want her to go, but, paradoxical as it may sound, he did want her to go. For choice he would have gone himself; but he

knew that if he did Leo would look upon it as distrust—not of her power to manage the new mare, but of her word. For she had as good as promised him that she would see Tom Candlish no more, and he felt that he was bound to show in every way possible that he enjoyed a confidence that he really did not feel. With Mary to bear Leo company he knew that she was safe, and even that would bear the aspect of espionage; but the girl had accepted the position, and they were ready to start.

The trio were on their way to the gate when the new mare uttered a loud whinnying noise which was answered from a distance. There was the sound of hoofs, and directly after North trotted up.

Mary drew a deep breath, and her nervousness in connection with her ride was killed by one greater, which forced her to rouse all her energies, so as to be calm during the coming encounter.

"Morning," cried the doctor merrily, as he shook hands with all in turn. "Going to try the new mare?"

"Yes," said the curate eagerly, while Leo was quiet and distant, and Mary her own calm self. "What do you think of her?"

The doctor, who, like most country gentlemen who keep a nag, considered himself a bit of a judge, looked the mare over, and grew critical.

"Well bred," he said, at the end of a few moments.

"Oh! I am glad," said Mary, eager to break the chilly silence that prevailed.

"I meant by descent," said the doctor merrily. "I don't know how she behaves."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mary, in a disappointed tone, while Leo looked on scornfully.

"But she seems quiet?" said the curate anxiously.

"Ye—es," replied the doctor dubiously, as he continued his examination. "Rather a wicked look about one eye."

"Don't, pray, Dr. North," said Leo petulantly. "My brother is quite fidgety enough about the mare. She is of course a little more mettlesome than our poor old plodding horse; but a child might drive her."

"Oh, yes, of course," said the doctor, in a tone which seemed to say, "But I would not answer for the consequences." Then aloud: "Bit swollen about that hock. May mean nothing. Nice-looking little thing, Salis."

"I'm glad you like her," said the curate eagerly.

"I did not say I liked her, old fellow," replied North. "I said she was well bred."

"But you don't think she is dangerous for ladies?"

"Oh, Hartley! How absurd!" cried Leo."

"Dangerous? surely not," said the doctor. "Have tried her yourself, of course?"

"Well, no," replied the curate. "I have been so busy: but the man has driven her several times."

"And says she goes very quietly," said Leo pettishly. "Hartley never has any confidence in my driving."

"Indeed, yes," said the curate, smiling at his sister affectionately. "I know that you

drive well, and are a clever horsewoman. I am only anxious about your driving a strange horse."

"But Leo will be very careful," said Mary, interposing to end a scene which was agony to her. "I am quite ready, Leo."

"Yes, let's go," said the latter. "Hartley wants to sell you the horse at a profit, Dr. North," she added banteringly. "Good morning all."

The curate said no more, but handed his sisters into the light low phaeton, Leo taking the reins in the most business-like manner before mounting, and then sitting upright on the raised seat in a way that would have satisfied the most exacting whip.

The mare started off at a touch, with her neck arched and her head well down, the wheels spinning merrily in unison with the sharp trot of the well-shaped hoofs.

"An uncommonly pretty little turn-out, old fellow," said the doctor, as he sat in the saddle watching critically till the chaise turned the corner; "and your sister drives admirably."

"Yes," said the curate rather dolefully; "she drives like she rides."

"And that's better than any lady who follows our pack of hounds," cried the doctor. "Now, if I had been anything of a fellow, I should have cantered along by their side, and shown myself off."

"You would," assented the curate; and his countenance seemed to say, "I wish you had."

"But, there, I am not anything of a fellow, and I have patients waiting, so here goes."

He pressed his horse's flanks, and went off in the other direction at a trot, while the curate, with his troubled look increasing, walked into the house.

"I suppose the mare's quite safe," he said; "and it pleases her. May take her attention off him. Poor Leo! It is very sad."

Meanwhile the doctor continued his way till he reached the stocks — a dilapidated set, as ancient-looking as the whipping-post which kept them company, and both dying

their worm-eaten death, as the custom of using them had died generations before.

But they had their use still, the doctor's horse stopping short by them, as if he knew his goal, and his master dismounting, and throwing his rein over the post before entering a low cottage, with red tile sides and thick thatch roof. The door was so low that he had to stoop his head to enter a scrupulously clean cottage room, with uneven red brick floor, brightly-polished stove, with a home-made shred hearthrug in front, and for furniture a well-scrubbed deal table, a high Windsor chair, a beautifully-carved old oaken chest or coffer, and a great, old-fashioned, eight-day clock, whose heavy pendulum, visible through a glazed hole in its door, swung ponderously to right and said *chick!* and then to left and said *chack!*

Empty as the old room was in one respect it was full in another, and that was of a faint ancient smell of an indescribable nature. It was not very unpleasant; it was not the reverse; but it had one great peculiarity—to wit, that of exciting a desire on the part of a

visitor to know what it was, till his or her eye rested upon the occupant of the tall armed Windsor chair, in which sat Jonadab Moredock, clerk and sexton of Duke's Hampton, when the idea came that the strange ancient odour must be that of decay.

"Well, old chap, how are we this morning?" said the doctor cheerily.

The red-eyed, yellow-skinned, withered old man placed his hands on the arms of his chair, raised himself an inch or two, gave his head a bob, and subsided again, as he shook his head.

"Bad, doctor—mortal bad; and if you goes away again like that you'll find me dead and buried when back you comes."

"Nonsense, Moredock; there are years upon years of good life in you yet."

"Nay, doctor, nay," moaned the old fellow.

"But I say yes. Why, you're only ninety."

"Ninety-three, doctor—ninety-three, and 'most worn out."

"Nonsense; there's a deal of work to be got out of you yet. Had your pipe?"

"Pipe? No. How can a man have a pipe who has no tobacco?"

"Ah well, never mind," said the doctor, "I've brought you some physic."

"Then I won't take it," cried the old man angrily. "I won't take it, and I won't pay for it, not a penny."

"Wait till you're asked," said the doctor drily, as he threw a packet of tobacco in the old fellow's lap. "There's your medicine. Now say you will not take it if you dare."

The old man's red-rimmed eyes twinkled at the sight of the shredded-up weed, around which his hand closed like the claws of a hawk. Then rising slowly, he took down from the chimneypiece a curious-looking old tobacco-box, which seemed as if it had been hammered out of a piece of sheet lead, and began to stuff the tobacco in.

"Where did you get that leaden box, Moredock?" said the visitor.

"I—I made it," said the old man, with a furtive look.

"Made it! I thought as much. Coffin lead, eh?"

"Never you mind about that, doctor. I found the lead when I was digging."

"And did you find that oak chest when you were digging, you old rascal?"

"Nay, nay, nay, that's nowt to do wi' you, doctor. Physic's your business, and not bits o' furnitur' in people's houses."

"Ah, well, we won't quarrel about that, Moredock; only I've taken a fancy to that old chest. I'll buy it of you."

"Nay, you won't, doctor; it isn't for sale."

"Then leave it to me in your will."

"Nay, and I shan't do that. It's for my grandchild, Dalily, who's up yonder at the Rectory, you know—her as had the measles when she was seventeen."

"Ah, yes, I know—the dark-eyed, rosy-cheeked hussy. Lucky girl to inherit that chest."

"Ay, but I don't know as she'll get it, doctor. Hussy! Yes, that's it. That's what she is, and if I see her talking to young Squire Luke Candlish's brother, Tom Candlish, again, she shan't have the chest."

"Then I'll set Tom Candlish to talk to her again, and then you'll leave it to me."

"Nay, you won't, doctor. I know you better than that. But he's a bad 'un. So's the squire. They're both bad 'uns. I know more about 'em than they think, and if Squire Luke warn't churchwarden, I could say a deal."

"And you will not?" said the doctor. "Well, I must be going. I say, though, did you get me that skull?"

"Nay, nay, nay," said the old man, shaking his head, as he lit his pipe, and began smoking very contentedly, with his eyes half closed. "I couldn't get no skulls, doctor. It would be sackerlidge and dessercation, and as long as I'm saxton there shall be nothing of that kind at Duke's Hampton. Bowdles doos it at King's Hampton: but no such doings here."

"But I want it for anatomical purposes, my good man."

"Can't help it, sir. I couldn't do it."

"Now what nonsense; it's only lending me a bone."

"You said sell it to you," said the old man sharply.

"Well, sell it. I'll buy it of you."

"Nay, nay, nay. What would Parson Salis say if I did such a thing? He'd turn me out of being saxton, neck and crop."

"Ah, well, I won't worry you, old fellow; and I must go now."

"Nay, don't go yet, doctor," cried the old man querulously. "You haven't sounded me, nor feeled me, nor nothing."

"Haven't I given you some comforting medicine?"

"Yes, doctor; bit o' 'bacco does me good; but do feel my pulse and look at my tongue."

"Ah, well, let's look," said the doctor, and he patiently examined according to rote. "It's Anno Domini, Moredock — Anno Domini."

"Is it, now, doctor? Ah, you always did understand my complaint. If it hadn't been for you, doctor——"

"We should have had a new sexton at Duke's Hampton before now, eh?"

"Yes, doctor," said the old man, with a shudder.

"Well, without boasting, old chap, I think I did pull you through that last illness."

"Yes, doctor, you did, you did; and don't go away again. You were away seven days—seven mortal days of misery to me."

"Oh, but you're all right," said the doctor, looking curiously at the old man.

"Nay, nay, nay. I thought I should have died before you come back, doctor; that I did."

"But you're better now."

"Yes, I'm better now, doctor. I feel safer-like, and I've got so much to do that I can't afford to be ill."

"And die?"

"Nay, nay, nay; not yet, not yet, not yet, doctor!"

"Ah, well, I'm glad I do you good, Moredock; but I think you might have lent me that skull."

"You said sell, doctor," cried the old man.

"Of course I should have paid you. But I suppose I must respect your scruples."

"Ay, do, doctor, and come oftener. Anno Domini, is it?"

"Yes."

"'Tain't a killing disease, is it, doctor?"

"Indeed but it is, old fellow. But, there, I'll come in now and then and oil your works, and keep you going as long as I can."

"Do, doctor, do, please. I shall feel so much safer when you've been."

"All right. Good-day, Moredock."

"Good-day, doctor," said the old man, gripping his visitor's arm tightly with a hook-like claw.

"Good-day; and if you do overcome your scruples, I should like that skull. It would be useful to me now."

The old man kept tightly hold of his visitor's arm, and hobbled to the door to look out, and then, still gripping hard at the arm, he said in a strange, cachinnatory way, as he laid down his pipe:

"He-he-he! hi-hi-hi! I've got it for you, doctor."

"What? The skull?"

"Hush! Of course I have; only one must make a bit o' fuss over it. Sackerlidge and dessercation, you know."

"Oh! I see."

"I wouldn't do such a thing for any one but a doctor, you know. Anno Domical purposes, eh?"

"You're getting the purpose mixed up with your disease, Moredock," said the doctor, as the old man took out a key from the pocket of his coat, and, after blowing in it and tapping it on the table, prior to drawing a pin from the edge of his waistcoat and treating the key as if it were a periwinkle, he crossed to the old oak coffer.

"Just shut that door, doctor," he said. "That's right. Now shove the bolt. Nobody aren't likely to come unless Dally Watlock does, for she always runs over when she aren't wanted, and stops away when she is. Thankye, doctor."

He stooped down, looking like some curious old half-bald bird, to unlock the chest, and then, after raising the lid a short

distance, in a cunningly secretive way, he thrust in one arm, and brought out a dark-looking human skull.

"Ha! yes," cried the doctor, taking the grisly relic of mortality in his hands. "Yes, that's a very perfect specimen; but it's a woman's, evidently. I wanted a man's."

"You said sell you a skull," said the old man angrily. "You never said nowt about man or woman."

"No. It was an oversight. There, never mind."

"Ay, but I do mind," grumbled the old man. "I like to sadersfy my customers. Give it me back."

"But this will do."

"Nay, nay, nay; it won't do," cried the old man peevishly. "Give it to me."

The doctor handed back the skull, and the old man hastily replaced it in the coffer, hesitated a few moments, and then brought out another skull.

"Ah! that's right," cried the doctor eagerly; "the very thing. How much?"

"Nay, nay, nay; I'm not going to com-

mit sackerlidge and dessercation. I can't sell it."

"But you are not going to give it to me?"

"Nay; I only thought as you might put anything you like on the chimbleypiece."

"I see," said the doctor, smiling, and placing a small gold coin there, the old man watching eagerly the while. "But I say, Moredock, how many more have you got in that chest?"

"Got?—there?" said the old man suspiciously. "Oh! only them two. Nothing more—nothing more." But the next instant, as if won over to confidence in his visitor, or feeling bound to trust him, he screwed up his face in a strange leering way, and opened the coffer wide.

"You may look in," he said. "You're a doctor, and won't tell. They're for the doctors."

"Your customers, eh?"

"Customers?" said the old man sharply; "who said a word about customers?"

"You did. So you deal in those things?"

"No, no; not deal in 'em. I find one sometimes—very old—very old. Been in the earth a mort o' years."

As he spoke he watched the doctor curiously while he inspected the specimens of osteology in the oak chest. Then, taking up a tin canister from the bottom, he gave it a shake, the contents rattling loudly, and upon opening it he displayed it half full of white, sound teeth.

"Dentists," he said, with a grin, which showed his own two or three blackened fangs. "They uses 'em. False teeth. People thinks they're ivory. So they are."

"Why, Moredock, what a wicked old wretch you are," said the doctor. "I don't wonder you feel afraid to die."

"Wicked? No more wicked than my neighbours, doctor. Every one's afraid to die, and wants to live longer. Wicked! How could I save a few pounds together, to keep me out o' the workus when I grows old, if I didn't do something like this?"

"Ah, how indeed?" said the doctor, looking half-wonderingly at the strange old being.

"And my grandchild, Dalily, up at the Rectory. Man must save—must save. Besides, it's doing good."

"Good, eh?"

"Yes," said the old fellow, with a hideous grin. "Lots o' them never did no good in their lives, and maybe they're thankful now they're dead to find that, after all, they're some use to their fellow-creatures."

"Ah! Moredock, people are always ready to find an excuse for their wrong-doing. Seems to me that I ought to expose you up at the Rectory."

"Nay, you won't tell the parson, doctor?" said the old man, with a chuckle.

"No, I shall say nothing, Moredock."

"No, doctor, you can't. You're in it. You set me to get that for you."

"There, stop that confounded laugh of yours, and take this quietly to the Manor House to-night. Shall you be well enough?"

"Have—have you got any more o' that Hollands gin, doctor?" whispered the old man, with a leer.

"About another glassful, I dare say."

"Then I shall be well enough to come, doctor. Nobody shall see what it is. And look here: you keep me alive and well, and you shall have anything you want, doctor. Parson's master in the church, but I'm master outside, and in the tombs, and in the old Candlish morslem. Like to see in it, doctor?"

"Pah! not I. See enough of the miserable breed alive without seeing them dead. Good-morning."

He remounted his horse, and rode out of the village by the main road, to draw rein at a pretty ivy-covered villa, whose well-kept garden and general aspect betokened wealth and some refinement.

"Mrs. Berens at home?" he asked, as the drag at a bell sent a silvery tinkle through the house.

The neat maid-servant drew back with a smile, and the doctor entered, and was shown into a pretty drawing-room, where he stood beating his boot with his riding-whip, and looking scornfully at the ornaments, lace, and gimcracks around.

CHAPTER VII.

A FRESH PATIENT.

"I ALWAYS feel like a fly," the doctor muttered—"a fly alighted upon a spider's web. The widow wants a husband. I wish some one would snap her up."

"Ah! doctor—at last," said a pleasant voice, which sounded as if it had passed through swan's-down, while a strong odour of violets helped the illusion.

"Yes, at last, Mrs. Berens," said the doctor, taking the extended, soft, white hand of the pleasant, plump lady of eight-and-thirty or forty, whose whole aspect was suggestive of a very pretty, delicate-skinned baby grown large. "Why, how well you look."

"Oh, doctor!"

"Indeed you do. Why, from your note I was afraid that you were seriously ill."

"And I have been, doctor. In such a low, nervous state. At one time I felt as if I should sink. But"—with a sigh—"I am better now."

The lady waved her kerchief towards a chair, and seated herself upon an ottoman, where, in obedience to the suggestion, she once more laid her hand in the doctor's firm white palm, wherein Jonadab Moredock's gnarled, yellow, horny paw had so lately lain; and as the strong fingers closed over the delicate white flesh, and a couple glided to the soft round wrist, the patient sighed.

"Oh, doctor, I do feel so safe when you are here. It would be too hard to die so young."

The doctor looked up quickly.

"Now that's wicked," said the lady reproachfully, "because I said 'so young.' Well, I'm not quite forty, and that is young. Is my pulse very rapid?"

"No, no. A little accelerated, perhaps. You seem to have been fretting."

"Yes, that's it, doctor. I have," said the lady.

"What a fool I am!" he said to himself, as he released the hand. Then aloud: "I see, I see. Little mental anxiety. You want tone, Mrs. Berens."

"Yes, doctor, I do," she sighed.

"Now what should you say if I prescribed a complete change?"

"A complete change, doctor?" said the lady, whose pulse was now certainly accelerated.

"Yes. That will be better than any of my drugs. A pleasant little two months' trip to Baden or Homburg, where you can take the waters and enjoy the fresh air."

"Oh, doctor, I could not go alone."

"Humph! No. It would be dull. Well, take a companion. Why not one of the parson's sisters? Mary Salis — or, no," he added, quickly, as he recalled certain family troubles that had been rumoured. "Why not Leo Salis?"

"Oh, no, doctor," said the lady, with a decisive shake of the head. I don't think

Miss Leo Salis and I would get on together long."

"The other, then," said the doctor.

"No, no. Prescribe some medicine for me."

"But you don't want medicine."

"Indeed, doctor, but I do. I'll take anything you like to prescribe."

"But——"

"Now, doctor, I am low and nervous, and you must humour me a little. I could not bear to be sent away. I should feel as if I had gone over there to die."

"When I guarantee that you would come back strong and well?"

"No, doctor, no. You must not send me away. Deal gently with me, and let me stop in my own nest. Ah, if you only knew my sufferings."

Dr. Horace North felt as if he fully knew, and was content to stand off at a distance, for though everything was extremely ladylike and refined, and there was a touch of delicacy mingled with her words, he could not help interpreting the meaning of the

widow's sighs and the satisfied look of pleasure which came over her countenance when he was at hand to feel her pulse.

"I do know your sufferings," he said gravely, "and you may rely upon me to bring any little skill I can command to bear upon your complaint. Think again over the idea of change."

"Oh, no, doctor," said the lady quickly. "I could not go."

"Ah, well, I will not press you," he said, rising. "I'll try and prescribe something that will give you tone."

"You are not going, doctor," said the lady, in alarm. "Why, you have only this moment come."

"Patients to see, my dear madam."

"No, it is not that. I worry you with my complaints. I am very, very tiresome, I own."

"Nonsense, nonsense," said the doctor; "but really I must hurry away."

"Without seeing my drawings, and the books I have had down from town! Ah! I am sure I bore you with my murmuring. A sick woman is a burden to her friends."

"If some one would only fetch me away in a hurry, I'd bless him," thought the doctor.

"There are times, doctor, when a few words of sympathy would make me bear my lot more easily, and——"

"Wheels, by George!" exclaimed the doctor.

"If you only knew——"

"There's something bolted."

"The dead vacancy in my poor heart."

"A regular smash if they don't look out. Woa, Tom! Steady, my lad!" cried the doctor, opening the French window and stepping out on to the lawn.

"Doctor, for pity's sake," sobbed Mrs. Berens, in anguished tones.

The patient's voice was so pitiful that the doctor could not resist the appeal, and though called as it were on both sides, he stepped rapidly back into the little drawing-room in time to catch the fainting widow in his arms.

Unfortunately for poor Mrs. Berens, who had for long felt touched by the young

doctor, a lady in distress, mental or bodily, or both, was always a patient to Dr. North, and he only retained her in his arms just long enough to lower her down in a corner of a soft couch, before rushing out of the window and through the gate, where his tied-up horse was snorting and kicking.

The poor brute had cause, for the rapid running of wheels and beat of hoofs were produced by Hartley Salis's phaeton and the new mare, which came down the road at a frantic gallop, with Mary clinging to the side of the vehicle, pale with dread, and Leo, apparently quite retaining her nerve, seated perfectly upright in her place, but unable to control the mare, one rein having given way at the buckle hole, and a pull at the other being so much madness.

They had come along for quite a mile at a headlong pace, till nearing Mrs. Berens' house, Leo caught sight of the doctor's cob, which pricked up its ears and began to rear and plunge.

To have kept on as they were meant a collision, and there was nothing left now for

the driver to do but draw gently upon the sound rein.

The pull given was vain, and a sharp one followed, just in time to make the half-bred mare swerve and avoid the doctor's cob; but the consequence was that the fore wheel of the phaeton caught a post on the other side of the road. There was a crashing sound, a wild scream, and the cause of the accident went off at a more furious pace than ever, with the shafts dangling and flying about her legs.

"Hurt? No, not much," cried the doctor, half lifting Leo from the grass at the side of the road; and hurrying to where Mary lay staring wildly, entangled among the fragments of the chaise.

"My poor child!" he cried. "Oh, this is bad work. Try and—— Here! Miss Leo—Mrs. Berens. Water—brandy—for Heaven's sake, quick!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"HOW I DO HATE THAT GIRL!"

"OH! my poor darling!"

It was Mrs. Berens who spoke; the accident, and its consequent call upon her for aid, having in an instant swept away all thought of self, and shown her at once in her best colours, full of true womanly sympathy.

Leo stood leaning against the hedge, dazed and perfectly helpless, while Mrs. Berens came running out to help; but only to rush in again and return with a decanter and water.

"Is she—is she——"

"Hush!" whispered the doctor sternly; "try and pour a few more drops between

her lips, and keep on bathing her forehead till I get her out."

Mrs. Berens was down upon her knees on one side of Mary Salis, with her hands and delicate dress bedabbled with blood; but she did not heed the dust or hideous stains as she passed her left arm beneath the poor girl's neck, and held her with her cut and bruised face resting upon her bosom, while the doctor tore hard at the crooked woodwork and iron which held the sufferer pinned down.

"Leo Salis," said the doctor impatiently, "if you're not hurt, don't stand dreaming there, but run off to the village for help."

Leo stared at him wildly for a moment or two, and then walked hastily away, holding her left wrist in her right hand, as if she were in pain.

"Hah! That's better," cried the doctor, as he set one foot against a portion of the iron-work, and pulled with all his might, his effort being followed by a loud cracking noise, and the iron bent. "Now, Mrs. Berens, I think we can lift her out."

"Yes; let me help," cried the widow energetically, and seeming quite transformed as she assisted in bearing the inanimate girl into the drawing-room.

"Quick, Mary, pillows," she cried; and her round-eyed, helpless maid ran upstairs, to return with the pillows, by whose aid Mary Salis was placed in a comfortable position.

Without its being suggested, Mrs. Berens herself fetched basin, sponge, and towels, with which the blood and dust were removed, the widow colouring once highly as the doctor awarded her a word of praise.

"Cut in the temple. Hair will cover it," said the doctor, as he rapidly dressed the insensible girl's injuries. "Nasty contusion there on the cheek—slight abrasion."

"Will it disfigure her, doctor?" said Mrs. Berens anxiously.

"Oh! no—soon disappear."

"What a comfort," sighed the widow, who evidently believed that a young lady's face was her fortune. "Is she much hurt, doctor?"

"No; I am in hopes that she is only suffering from the concussion. That bleeding has been good for her. She is coming round."

"Poor darling!" cried Mrs. Berens, tenderly kissing Mary's hand.

"You're an uncommonly good, useful woman, Mrs. Berens," said the doctor bluntly. "I didn t think you had it in you."

"Oh, doctor!" she cried.

"Spoilt your dress and lace too. But, never mind, it will bring her round. Ah! that's better; she's coming to."

"Is she?"

The doctor pointed to the quivering lips, as the next minute there was a weary sigh, and Mary Salis opened her eyes to gaze wildly round, and then made an effort as if to rise, but she only raised her head and let it fall back with a moan.

"Are you in pain?" said the doctor, as he took her hand.

She looked at him wildly, and a faint colour came into her cheek as she whispered hoarsely:

"Yes. Send—for a doctor."

"He is here, my poor dove," cried Mrs. Berens. "Don't you know him—Dr. North?"

"Yes; but send—for some one—a doctor."

"A little wandering," whispered North, bending over Mary, who tried to shrink from him. "Now," he said gently, "try and tell me where you feel pain. I must see to it at once."

"No, no. Don't touch me—a doctor—send for a doctor," answered Mary.

"But Mr. North is a doctor, my poor dear," cried Mrs. Berens.

"Send—for a doctor," whispered Mary again; and then she uttered a faint cry of indignation and dread commingled as, thinking of nothing but the case before him, the doctor began to make the necessary preliminary examination, to stop short at the end of a minute, and lay his hand upon the patient's forehead, aghast at the discovery he felt that he had made.

"Don't resent this," he said kindly. "Believe me, it is necessary, and I will not give you more pain than I can help."

"Mrs. Berens," sobbed the poor girl, "your hand."

"My darling!" cried the widow, taking the extended hand, to hold it pressed against her lips.

"Now, Miss Salis," said the doctor, "I want you to move yourself gently—a little more straight upon the couch."

She looked at him strangely.

"Now, please," he said. "It will be an easier position."

But still she did not move.

"Did you try?" he said rather hoarsely.

"Yes—I tried," she said faintly; and then the flush deepened in her face again, as the doctor bent over the couch, and changed the position in which she lay.

"Did I hurt you?" he said.

"No. Did you move me?" she faltered; and Mrs. Berens looked at him inquiringly.

"Just a trifle," he said gravely. "Ah! here's Salis."

There was a quick step outside, and the curate rushed in, followed more slowly by Leo, who looked ghastly.

"Mary, my dear child," he cried, throwing himself upon his knees beside his sister, "are you much hurt?"

"I think not, Hartley, dear," she replied, with a smile. "My head is not so giddy now."

"Oh! what a madman I was to let you go," he cried.

"Hush, dear! It was an accident," said the poor girl tenderly. "I shall soon be better. You are hurting Leo. She suffers more than I."

"That cursed mare, North. She looked vicious. How was it, Leo?"

"She pulled, and one of the reins broke," said Leo hoarsely. "There would have been an accident with any horse."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Mary faintly; "and I am very sorry, Hartley. The chaise —the expense. Thank dear Mrs. Berens, and now let me try and walk home."

"No, no, my dear," said Mrs. Berens, "you must not think of going. Stay here, and be nursed. I'll try so hard to make you well."

"I know you would," said Mary gently; "but I shall be better at home. Leo, dear, help me up. No, no, Hartley; I did not want to send you away. I'm better now."

She made an effort to rise, as the doctor looked on with eager eyes awaiting the result, at which his lips tightened, and he glanced at Mrs. Berens.

For Mary Salis moved her hands and arms, and slightly raised her head, but let it fall again, and looked from one to the other wildly, as if her perplexity were greater than she could bear.

Hartley Salis caught his friend by the wrist, and then yielded himself, and followed the doctor as he moved from the room.

"North, old fellow," he said, in an eager whisper, "what does that mean? Is she much hurt?"

"Try and bear it like a man, Salis. It may not be so bad as I fear, but I cannot hide from you the truth."

"The truth! Good heavens, man, speak out!"

"Hush! She is too weak from the shock

to bear it now. Let her learn it by degrees, only thinking at present that she is nerveless and stunned."

"But you don't mean—— Oh, North!" cried the curate, in agony.

"Salis, old friend, it would be cruel to keep back the truth," said the doctor, taking his hand. "It may not be so bad, but I fear there is some terrible injury to the spine."

"Good heavens!" cried Salis wildly; "that means paralysis and death."

"Let's hope not, old friend."

"Hope!" cried the curate wildly. "How has that poor girl sinned that she should suffer this?"

At that moment the truth had come home to Mary Salis that her injury was terrible in extent, and she lay there gazing wildly at her handsome sister, but seeing beyond her in the long, weary vista of her own life a helpless cripple, dragging her way slowly onward towards the end.

Then there was a low, piteous sigh, and Mrs. Berens came quickly to the door.

"Doctor," she whispered, "come back. Fainted!"

North hurried back into the room, to find Mary Salis lying back, white as if cut in marble, while her sister stood gazing at her in silence, making no movement to be of help.

"How I do hate that girl!" he muttered, as he went down on one knee by the couch.

CHAPTER IX.

DR. NORTH SEES A WHITE MARK.

Patient never had more assiduous attention than Mary Salis received from Dr. North. He had formed his opinions about her case, but insisted upon having further advice, and Mr. Delton—the old *savant* of the lecture—was proposed.

"I'm afraid he will want a heavy fee, Salis," said North; "but you ought to make a sacrifice at a time like this, and his opinion is the best."

"Any sacrifice; every sacrifice," said the curate. "Send for him at once."

Mr. Delton came down and held a consultation with North.

He seated himself afterwards by Mary's

couch, where she, poor girl, lay, flushed, and suffering agony mentally and bodily, consequent upon this visit.

But when the gray-headed old man took her hand between both his, and sat gazing in her eyes, those eyes brimmed over with tears. The fatherly way won upon her, and she said softly, as she clung to him :

"Tell me the worst."

He remained silent, gazing at her fixedly for some time, but at last he raised and kissed her hand.

"I will speak out," he said gently, "because I can read in your sweet young face resignation and patience. To another, perhaps, I should have preached patience and hope; to you I feel that it would be a mockery, and I only say, bear your misfortune by palliating it with the work your intellect will supply."

"Always to be a cripple, doctor—a helpless cripple?" she moaned.

"My child, your life has been spared. Patience. What seems so black now may appear brighter in time. You have those

you love about you, and there is the faint hope that some day you may recover."

"Faint hope, doctor?"

"I must say faint, my child. And now good-bye. I shall hear about you from our friend North. I congratulate you on having so able a friend. You may trust him implicitly. Good-bye."

He raised her hand to his lips—a very unprofessional proceeding, but it did not seem so to Mary, as she lay there and watched the bedroom door close.

"Trust him? Yes," sighed Mary, as she lay with her hands clasped, thinking of Horace North's many kindly attentions to his patient. "Yes, to his patient!" she said bitterly. "A hopeless cripple! Oh, God, give me strength to bear it without repining. Good-bye, good-bye, my love—my love!"

There was a little scene going on in the dining-room at the Rectory, for in spite of Mrs. Berens' protestations, Mary Salis had been carried home.

The curate had thanked the old surgeon

for coming down, and the old man had nodded, to stand thoughtfully, hat in hand, gazing out of the window with Salis.

"A very sad case, Mr. Salis—a very sad case. So young and innocent and sweet."

"Then there is no hope, sir?" said the curate hoarsely.

"Of her regaining her strength, sir? Very little. But of her recovering sufficiently to lead a gentle, resigned, patient life, yes. You are a clergyman, sir. I need not preach to you of duty. Ah, Mr. North, what about the train?"

"One moment, sir," said the doctor, interrupting the whispered conversation he was holding with the curate.

The next minute he had asked the great surgeon a question, and received a short decisive answer, which was communicated to Salis.

"But, my dear sir," he said, in remonstrance, "I have brought you down here on professional business. I am not a rich man, but still not so poor that——"

"My dear Mr. Salis, I am a rich man,"

said the old surgeon, smiling, "and partly from my acquaintance with Dr. North, partly from the pleasure it has given me to meet your sweet sister, I feel so much interest in her case that I must beg of you not to spoil a pleasant friendly meeting by introducing money matters. No, no; don't be proud, my dear sir. I possess certain knowledge. Don't deprive me of the pleasure of trying to benefit Miss Salis."

"He's a fine old fellow as ever breathed," said North, returning to the Rectory, after seeing the great surgeon to the station.

"A true gentleman," said the curate sadly. "How can I ever repay him?"

"He told me—by helping your poor sister to get well."

"Ah!" sighed the curate; "it is a terrible blow."

"Terrible," acquiesced North. "But she'll bear it, sir, ten times better than her sister Leo would. By the way, I haven't seen her."

"No; I have just been asking about

her. The scene was too painful for her, poor girl, and she went out so as to be away."

"Oh!" said North quietly; and then to himself: "I can't bear that girl!"

Just as he spoke he saw Leo Salis enter the meadow gate after her walk, and soon after she came into the room, looking perfectly quiet and composed.

"What does the London doctor say?" she asked, after shaking hands with North.

"Don't ask, Leo," said the curate, with a groan.

"Poor Mary!" said Leo, with a sigh, but she did not seem stirred. There were no tears in her eyes, and she might have been making inquiry about the health of some parishioner.

So North thought.

"I'll go up and sit with her now, Hartley," she said quickly, and turned to leave the room, when Horace North's eyes became fixed upon a white mark at the back of the young girl's sleeve—a mark which looked

exactly as if her arm had been held by some one wearing a well pipe-clayed glove.

The next moment the young girl, the dark sleeve, and the white mark had passed from Horace North's sight, and soon after from his mind.

CHAPTER X.

THE DOCTOR PRESCRIBES.

"THERE, my dear, I shall give you up now," said North one day, about three months after the accident. "Ah! you look bad!"

Mary was downstairs, lying back in an easy-chair, and she coloured slightly, and there was a faint gathering of wrinkles on her white forehead at his easy-going, paternal way.

"Yes," said Mary. "Do advise him, doctor. He is far from well."

"Yes; he's a bad colour," said North bluffly.

"Hadn't you better suggest that I should be painted?" said the curate tartly.

"Another bad sign," said North, with a

good-tempered look at Mary. "He talks to his old friend in that way. Bile, Miss Salis—bile."

"It's bother, not bile," cried the curate sharply. "I beg your pardon, old fellow."

"Granted. But what's the matter?"

"Everything. I'm troubled about the church matters. The squire is rector's churchwarden, and somehow we don't get on."

"That's a wonder," said the doctor drily.

"Then, I'm in trouble with the rector."

"Why, what's he got to say for himself? He's nearly always in London, so as to be within reach of his club. It isn't time for him to come down and give us another of his sermons, is it?"

"No. It isn't about that."

"What then?"

"Oh! nothing."

"Come, out with it!"

The curate glanced at Mary, who shook her head slightly, but he went on.

"The fact is, old fellow, May takes upon himself to write me most unpleasant,

insolent letters. He learns from some mischief-making body that Leo hunts, and I never hear the last of it."

"Humph! Why not put a stop to it, and sell the mare?"

The curate shook his head.

"I don't like her," said the doctor. "She'll be getting your sister into some fresh scrape."

"Don't talk like that, man. She has done mischief enough. What nonsense! Leo can do anything she likes with her now."

"Glad to hear it; and now I want to do what I like with you."

"So you do," said the curate good-humouredly.

"Not quite. You're horribly snappish. Sure sign of being a little out of order. I shall prescribe for you."

"Do," said Salis grimly, "and I'll take the medicine and poison some one else with it."

"No need; plenty of people are doing that. Now, look here, you worry yourself too much about everyday matters."

"Nonsense!"

"It is quite true, Mr. North," said Mary, smiling.

"There, sir, you hear. Then you don't take enough exercise."

"Indeed, but I do. I spend half my time going about."

"Visiting the poor," cried the doctor. "Harassing yourself with other folks' troubles, and listening to endless stories of worry."

"Yes, Mr. North, quite true."

"What nonsense, Mary!" cried the curate piteously. "I must do my duty."

"Of course, my dear sir, so do it; but don't overdo it. Recipe——"

"I won't take it," said the curate.

"Miss Salis here shall make you, sir. Recipe: 'One good cigar or two pipes of bird's-eye per diem, and three hours to be spent in gardening or fishing every day.'"

Mary's eyes brightened in forgetfulness of her own trouble as she rejoiced in the advice given to her brother.

"It's all rubbish, North. I've no time to give to fishing or gardening. As to the cigar, I might manage that."

"Pills no use without the draught," said the doctor.

"But you a doctor, and prescribe tobacco —a poison!"

"Does people good to poison them a little when they're out of order."

"But May grumbles as it is, and is never satisfied. What will he say if he hears of my smoking, and pottering about with a fishing-rod?"

"Tell May to mind his points at whist and leave us alone. There, I must be off. Take my advice, too, about the mare. I shall always hate her for the injury she did to poor Miss Salis here. Good-bye, both of you."

"Stop a minute," said the curate. "What about yourself?"

"Well, what about myself?"

"The great idea — the crotchet — the cr——"

"Well, say it—the craze, man! Every inventor is considered a lunatic till his invention works. Wait, my dear fellow—wait. I may astonish you yet. Good-bye, Miss Salis."

He shook hands, and left the Rectory parlour with Salis, the saddle creaking loudly as he mounted and then rode away.

"Good fellow, Horace," sighed the curate, "but only fit for a West End practice, among people with plenty of time and money. I fancy myself smoking on the river bank, throwing flies and pitching in ground bait. It's absurd!"

"Poor Miss Salis!" said Mary to herself, as she repeated the doctor's sympathetic, pitying words; and it was forced upon her more and more plainly in what light he regarded her. She was his patient — nothing more. No; this was unjust, for he always treated her most warmly—as a friend—almost as a sister.

But her old hopes and aspirations seemed to be dead for ever, without promise of revival.

At that moment the curate returned.

"Poor Leo! he said. "I could not do that," as he again thought of how attached she had become to the mare, and how the handsome little creature had seemed to divert her attention from the past.

"It would not do, Mary," he said aloud. "Poor girl! I seem to have been very hard upon her about Tom Candlish, and it would be too bad to deprive her of the mare."

"She appears very fond of it," said Mary gravely.

"And the more fond she gets of it the less she thinks about anything else, eh?"

Mary was silent.

"She never mentions him to you now?"

"No, Hartley."

"Hah! That's a good job. It was hard work and painful; but I nipped that in the bud."

Mary was silent, and looked at her brother uneasily.

"Well, what is it, dear? Not comfortable?"

"Yes, Hartley, I am quite comfortable," said Mary, smiling sadly.

"But you looked at me in a peculiar way. You don't believe that Leo thinks about him now?"

"I don't know, Hartley. I am not sure."

"Oh! but I am. It's all right, my dear.

The girl's ideas are quite changed now, and I am beginning to be hopeful that she thinks a little of North. Why, my dear Mary, how ghastly pale you do look to-day. Are you worse?"

"No, no, dear; indeed no. I—I fancy I am getting better."

"That's right; but I am trespassing on you by talking too much. How thoughtless man can be!"

"And how thoughtful," said Mary, as she took his hand in hers, and held it to her cheek. "Don't reproach yourself, Hartley; you give me pain."

The curate bent down and kissed her, and she leaned back and closed her eyes, so that her brother should not see how they were suffused with tears.

"Patience," she said softly; "give me patience to be unselfish, and bear my bitter lot."

CHAPTER XI.

JONADAB MOREDOCK SEES A GHOST.

Moredock was better by the next Saturday, and he got up with the intention of having a good long day at the church.

"Must keep friends with the doctor," he muttered. "Can't afford to die yet. So much to do first."

He looked up at his clock, and the clock's sallow round face looked down at him, pointing out how time was getting on, and kept on its monotonous *chick chack*, as the old pendulum swung from side to side.

"Mornin', old Moredock," cried a cheery rustic voice, and a rough, fair, curly head was thrust in at the doorway, the owner of the body keeping it carefully outside, as he

held in at arm's length an old patched boot, which had evidently been soaked in water to allow for a series of great stitches to be put into the upper leather.

For the moment it seemed as if Moredock was some grim old idol, carved in yellowish-brown wood, as he sat in his chair in the middle of his sanctuary, and the new comer was an idolater, bringing him a peace offering; but the idea died away as the old man snarled out:

"Mornin', young Chegg. So you've brought it at last."

"At last! Well, I haven't had it so very long. Sixpence."

"Sixpence! What, for sewing up that crack?"

"Yes, and cheap, too. Why, I'd ha' charged parson a shilling. How are you?"

"How am I? Ah! that's it, is it? That's what you've come for. Not dead yet, Joe Chegg, and they don't want another clerk and saxton for the old church."

"Nay——"

"Hold your tongue when I'm speaking.

Think I don't know you. Want to step in my shoes, do you? Want to marry my grandchild Dally, do you? Well, you're not going to while I'm alive, and I'm going to live another ten year."

"That's all right," said the young man, rubbing his face with a hard hand, much tanned, and coated with wax. "I don't want you to die."

"Yes, you do," cried the old man fiercely. "I see you looking me up and down, and taking my measure. Think you're going to dig my grave, do you? Well, you're not going to these ten years to come; and p'r'aps I shall dig yours first, Joe Chegg; p'r'aps I shall dig yours."

It was a cool morning, in the hunting season, but the young man perspired, and shifted uneasily from foot to foot.

"Oh! I don't know, Mr. Moredock, sir," he muttered awkwardly.

"Then I do," cried the old sexton, dragging his hand out of his trousers' pocket. "There's a fourpenny piece. Quite enough for your job, and I tell you now as I mean

to tell you ten year hence, you ain't going to be saxton o' Dook's Hampton while Jonadab Moredock's alive, so be off."

"I don't want nothing but what's friendly like, Mr. Moredock, sir. I thought as when you was out o' sorts I might be a kind o' depitty like, to ring the bells for you, and dig a grave for you."

"Ah!" shouted the old man, "that's it — that's what Parson Salis calls showing the cloven hoof. You said it, and you can't take it back. You'd like to dig a grave for me."

"I meant to put some one else in," said the young man, staring.

"No, you didn't; you meant to put me in; but I'll live to spite you. I'll ring my own bells, and say my own amens and 'sponses, and dig my own graves; and if you marry Dally Watlock, not a penny does she have o' my money, and I'll burn the cottage down."

The young man wiped his forehead and backed slowly towards the door, just inside which he had been standing during the latter

part of the interview, and as soon as he was outside he hurried away.

"Not going to die yet," muttered the old man. "I can't and won't die yet. I'll let 'em see. Doctor said a man's no business to die till he's quite wore out, and I'm not wore out yet—nothing like. I'll show 'em. Only wish somebody would die, and I'd show 'em. Give up, indeed!"

A sharp fit of coughing interrupted the old man, and left him so exhausted that he took his seat and leaned back, staring at the fire, and only moving at times to put on a lump of coal, till towards evening, when he rose and made himself some tea. Then, putting a piece of candle loose in his pocket, with happy indifference to the fact that it was not wax, he took a box of matches from the mantelpiece and thrust them in with the candle, as he believed, felt in another pocket for his key, and trudged off to the church to put things in order for the next day's service.

Moredock reached the old lych gate in the dark autumnal evening, passed through,

and ascended the path, which looked like a cutting in the churchyard, six hundred years of interments having raised the ground till it formed a bank, while the church itself seemed to have become sunken.

Half-way up he struck off along a narrower path which curved round to the old iron-studded door in the tower, a door whose hinges resembled Norse runes, so twisted and twined was the iron-work.

The heavy old key was inserted, turned, and taken out, and as the door yielded to pressure the key was inserted on the other side. The next minute the door was closed and locked, and Moredock stood in the old tower, fumbling in the darkness for the horn lantern which stood in a stone niche.

The lantern was found, opened, and the piece of candle inserted in the socket. The next thing was a search for the matches, which, however, were not found, for they were reposing on the rug in the sexton's cottage.

And there he stood fumbling and muttering for some minutes in the total darkness,

till, believing that the matches must have been left behind, he uttered a loud grunt, and prepared to do without.

It was no great difficulty; for, as he stood in the basement of the old square tower, with the five bells high above his head, and the ropes hanging therefrom, he knew that to his right ran the rickety old flight of stairs leading to the different floors and the leads of the tower; on his left his tools leaning against the stone wall, and the great cupboard in which, in company with planks and ropes, were sundry grisly-looking relics, dug up from time to time, but never seen by any one but himself; behind him was the door by which he had entered, and facing him the lancet-shaped little opening through the tower wall, leading into the west end of the church.

It was dark enough where he next stood, for he was beneath the loft where the school children and the singers sat on Sundays; but in front of him, dimly seen by the great east window being beyond it, and looking like an uncouth, dwarf, one-legged

monster, was the massive stone font, round which he passed slowly, and then walked straight along the centre aisle towards the tomb-encumbered chancel, cut off by its antique oaken screen.

His steps were hushed by the matting, and the darkness, in spite of the windows on either side, was intense behind, though above the old deal unpainted pews there seemed to float a dim haze, as if from the great east window, as he made his way towards the door on the north side of the chancel.

Moredock could have walked swiftly along the church in the dark, and he had often done so when he was younger. He could recall the time, too, when he had whistled softly as he went about dusting cushions and rearranging hassocks and matting. But now he had no breath left for whistling, and he walked—almost shuffled—along slowly towards the vestry, where he had nothing to do but give the gown and surplice a shake and hang them up again, and refill the large water-bottle from Gumley's

pump, which drew water from a well in remarkably close proximity to the churchyard.

The big pews shut him in right and left, so that had he been visible to any one at a distance, it would have seemed as if a head and shoulders were gliding along the church; but there was no one to see him. All the same, though, Moredock could see, and as well as was possible he saw something which made him stop short just half-way between the font and the eagle lectern, to shade his eyes and gaze towards the chancel.

He did not believe in ghosts. He had been night and day in that old church too many hundred times to be scared at anything—at least so he thought. But perhaps owing to the fact that he had been ill, he was ready to be weak and nervous, and hence it was that he stood as if sealed to the spot, gazing at a dimly seen head, draped in long folds like that of the lady on the old mural slab on the south wall by the door. It was gray and dim as that always seemed in its recess, and as it glided along

the south aisle it disappeared behind a pillar, all so dimly seen as to be next to invisible, and then reappeared in front of the pulpit, passed through the screen into the chancel, where it was seen a trifle more plainly; and then, as the old man gazed, the draped head grew for a moment more distinct, and then seemed to melt into thin air.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEXTON'S FETCH.

"Why, Moredock, you are not going to tell me that you believe in ghosts?"

"No, doctor, for I don't; and I've been in that church and the vaults sometimes all night."

"All night, eh? What for, eh?"

"That's my business, doctor. P'r'aps I was on the look out for body-snatchers; but I've been there all night, and no ghosts never troubled me."

"And yet here you are, all shivering and nervous—too ill to attend service this morning; and you tell me you saw something in the church last night."

"Ay, and so I did, doctor. I s'pose I

swownded away, I was took so bad; and must have laid there for hours before I got up and crawled home; and Parson Salis must be in a fine taking this morning, for there's nothing done in the church."

"Oh! never mind that, Moredock; Mr. Salis is sorry you are ill. He's a good fellow, and he sent me on this morning. You're a bit nervous and shaken at what you fancied you saw. Come, Moredock, old man, I'm a doctor, and you're a sexton, and we're too much men of the world—we've seen and known too much—to be afraid of ghosts, eh?"

"Ghosts! Sperits! I'm afraid of no ghosts, doctor; but I see that thing o' Saturday night."

"Thought you saw it, old chap!"

"Nay, doctor, I saw it; and that's what scares me."

"Pooh! You scared at something you saw—a hollow turnip and a sheet! A trick played by some scamp in the village."

"Trick played? Nay, doctor; there isn't a lad in the village dare do it. I know 'em.

I aren't scared at the thing I saw. It's at what it means."

"What it means! Then, what does it mean?"

"Notice to quit this here earthly habitation, as parson calls it, doctor. That's what it means."

"Rubbish!"

"Ah! you say that to hide your bad work, doctor, and because you know you arn't done your duty by me."

"Why, you ungrateful old humbug! I've done no end for you. Haven't I gone on oiling your confounded old hinges for years past, to keep you from dropping off, rusted out?"

"Ah! I don't say anything again that, doctor; but you've always thought me a poor man, and you've treated me like a poor man—exactly like. If you'd thought me well off, and you could send me in a big bill, you'd have had me in such condition that I shouldn't have seen my fetch last night."

"Seen your grandmother, man."

"Ay, you may laugh, doctor; but what have you told me over and over again? 'Moredock,' says you, 'a healthy man's no business to die till he's quite worn out.' And 'What age will that be, doctor?' says I. 'Oh! at any age,' says you; and here am I, a hale, hearty man, only a little more'n ninety, and last night I see my fetch."

"But you're not a hale, hearty man, Moredock."

"Tchah! Whatcher talking about? Why, I'd 'bout made up my mind to be married again."

"You? Married? Why, even I don't think of such a thing."

"You? No," said the old man, contemptuously. "You're not half the man I've been. My son's gal—Dally Watlock's 'fended me, and if she don't mind she'll lose my bit o' money."

"You take my advice, Moredock, and don't marry."

"Shan't leave you nothing, if I don't marry, doctor," said the old man, with a cunning leer; "and you needn't send in

no bills because you've found out I've got a bit saved up."

"Why, you wicked old ruffian, I suppose you've scraped together a few pounds by trafficking in old bones, and of what you've robbed the church."

"Never you mind, doctor, how I got it, or how much it is."

"I don't; but just you be wise, sir. You're not going to marry again, and you're going to leave your money to your grandchild."

"Eh? What—what? Do you want to marry her?"

"No, I don't, Moredock; but if you don't behave yourself, hang me if I come and doctor you any more. You may send over to King's Hampton for Dr. Wellby, or die if you like: I won't try and save you."

"No, no, no; don't talk like that, doctor—don't talk like that," whimpered the old man; "just now, too, when I'm so shook."

"Then don't you talk about disinheriting your poor grandchild. Come, hold up, More-

dock! I didn't mean it. There's nothing much the matter."

"Ah! but there is, doctor. I saw my fetch last night."

"No, you did not. You were not strong enough to go up to the church, and you fancied you saw something."

"I see it."

"Well, suppose you did. Some one had gone into the church to fetch a hymn-book, or put in a new cushion."

"Nobody couldn't, but me and parson, and squire and you. I see it, and it was my fetch."

"No, no, old fellow; you're mistaken. You were in the dark, and your head weak."

"I see it, and it was my fetch, doctor."

"Very well, then, Moredock, it was your fetch; but we won't let it fetch you for some years to come. What do you say to that?"

"Ah! now you're talking sensible, doctor," cried the old man, brightening up. "Look here, doctor, you do what's right by me, and let me have the best o' stuff—good physic,

you know—and there isn't anything I won't do for you. A skull, or a bone of any kind, or a whole set, or——"

"There, that will do, Moredock. I'll do my duty by you, and I don't want any reward."

"No, you don't. You're a good fellow, doctor; and you do understand my complaint, don't you?"

"Yes, thoroughly. There, sit back in your chair, and keep quiet. Mr. Salis is coming in to see you by-and-by."

"Nay, nay, nay! I don't want he. It makes a man feel as if he's very bad when parson comes to see him."

"Why, I'm sure he's a thoroughly good friend to you, old fellow."

"Oh! yes, he's right enough; but as soon as ever he comes in this here room, he'll begin talking to me about what a sinner I've been."

"Well, quite right, too."

"Maybe, doctor, maybe," said the old man, bursting into a loud cachinnation; "but he don't know everything, doctor, do he? If

he did, he'd lay it on thicker; and he wouldn't be quite so friendly with you."

"Come, come, Moredock," said the doctor, laughing. "Suppose we leave professional secrets alone, eh?"

"Ay, ay, doctor, we will. I don't forget what you've told me; but do go and tell parson I'm a deal better, and that he needn't come."

"Why? A visit won't do you any harm."

"Maybe not, doctor—p'r'aps not; but as soon as he comes he'll want to read me a chapter and then pray over me; and I'm that soaked with it all, after these many years, that I haven't room for no more."

"But, Moredock——"

"There, it's of no use for you to talk. Think I don't know! Why, I know more chapters and bits of the sarvice by heart than half-a-dozen parsons."

"Ah, well! I'll send you a bottle of mixture as soon as I get home, so sit up and make yourself comfortable."

"May I smoke my pipe, doctor?"

"Oh, yes, as long as you like, man. You're not bad; and take my advice: just you forget all about your fetch, as you call it, and don't go to the church any more in the dark."

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER CHURCH.

The doctor left the sexton's cottage, thinking deeply on the way in which the brain is affected by the weakness of the body.

"Poor old fellow!" he muttered; "nearly a hundred years old, and clinging to life more tightly than ever. Believes he saw something, of course. Not fit to go out alone. But he'll pull round, and perhaps last for years. Wonderful constitution, but also an exemplification of my pet theory. Humph! coming out of church. Well, I must meet 'em, I suppose. Hallo! what's going to happen? Has Salis converted the pair of reprobates? Morning, Squire; morning, Mr. Candlish."

He shook hands—professionally, as he called it—with the young squire and his brother, who were just out of church, and walked slowly on with them, discussing the hunt, election matters, and the state of the country.

"Why don't you hunt more, doctor?" said the squire, a florid, fine-looking man, singularly like his brother, but more athletic of build.

"Want of time," said the doctor good-humouredly. "Too many irons in the fire."

"You work too hard. But look here—don't be offended; I've always a spare mount or two when you are disposed for a gallop."

"Thanks; I'll ask one of these days—which never come," the doctor added to himself. "And now, good-day."

"No, no; come on, and have a bit of dinner with us—early dinner to-day."

"Thanks—no; I've a patient or two to see, and I want a word with the parson."

"We don't," said the squire; "eh, Tom? We've had ours."

Tom Candlish scowled.

"Well, always glad to see you, doctor—non-professionally," said the squire; and they went on, while North turned back to meet Salis, wondering why Tom Candlish had condescended to come to church.

"To stare at Leo, I'll be sworn, and Salis must have felt it. I'll be bound to say he made a dozen mistakes in the service this morning through that fellow coming. And, as for the squire—that young man drinks, and he had better look out, or Moredock will have a grand funeral to attend."

"Good morning, doctor. Were you coming to see me?"

"Ah, Mrs. Berens! I beg your pardon; I didn't see you."

"No, doctor, you never do seem to see me. You forget your most anxious patients," said the lady pathetically.

"But, really, you did not send me word."

"No, I did not send you word. I lived in hope of your coming."

"Thank goodness!" thought the doctor. "This woman is growing dangerous."

His pious ejaculation was consequent upon the fact that his friend, the curate, was approaching in company with Leo.

Mrs. Berens became aware of the fact at the same time, and though she uttered no pious ejaculation, she was equally pleased, for two reasons.

The first was that through the past two hours she had been seated in the same building with Leo Salis; the pews were high, and Leo could only have seen the top of her bonnet, whereas the handsome widow did not go to great expense for the most fashionable *modes et robes*, as the dressmakers express it, for nothing. The most elegant head-gear, though it may afford some satisfaction to the wearer, is hardly worth wearing, unless it be envied by those of the one sex and admired by the other. This encounter with the doctor would give handsome Leo a good opportunity for envious glances, and as Mrs. Berens could not rival her neighbour in contour, she would have some chance of standing upon an equal footing.

The other reason was that she wished the

curate to come up and speak to her at the same time as she was talking to the doctor. For Mrs. Berens was not deeply in love; she only wished to be. The doctor and the curate were both fine, manly fellows, to either of whom she would have been willing to give herself and fortune; but somehow they had both been terribly unimpressionable, and though she had shown as plainly as she dared, any time during the past year, the tenderness waiting to burst forth, she was still Mrs. Berens, and twelve months older.

Here was an opportunity of playing one off against the other; for men could often be stirred, she knew, into learning the value of something when they saw that it was gliding from their grasp.

The couple from the Rectory came up, and Mrs. Berens felt a pang as, after her warm salutations, in which her hand had rested in that of the curate for a few moments, to receive nothing more than a frank, friendly pressure, she saw that of Leo Salis rest in the doctor's longer than she considered prudent. Leo seemed unusually handsome, too, that

morning. There was a bright flush on her cheeks; her eyes sparkled, and she looked twenty, while Mrs. Berens felt that she looked nearly forty.

Salis was glad of the encounter, for it was true that he had been making mistakes that morning. The very fact that Tom Candlish was in the church was disturbing, and when he knew that he must have come—he could not believe otherwise — expressly to stare at Leo, the presence of the man whom he had thrashed in so unclerical a way acted on his thoughts as a pointsman acts over trains at a busy junction—sent them flying in different directions beyond the drivers' control.

The curate's colour was heightened, for he knew that he had appeared at a disadvantage before the more thoughtful of his congregation. He was anxious, too, about Leo, who looked excited, and he dreaded any renewal of the past trouble; so that the encounter was satisfactory, if only from the fact that it afforded temporary relief from worrying thoughts and cares.

Mrs. Berens was sweetness itself to all,

and Leo seemed to rouse herself to be pleasant to the doctor, the result being that Mrs. Berens was seen home—to part most affectionately from Leo, and with most tenderly friendly pressures of the hand to the gentlemen; after which she hurried into her room, to tear off her new bonnet and indulge in a passionate burst of sobbing.

"She's as deceitful as she is young," she cried. "She has thrown over Tom Candlish, and now she is winning over that foolish doctor; while Hartley Salis is as immovable as a stone.

"I'll be even with her," she cried. "Either Tom Candlish or the squire would be glad to marry me. I'll have one of them, and I'll make her half die with envy by asking her to my house, and—yes, there they go, and Horace North is going into the house with them. Ugh! the monster! He deserves to have the doorstep sink beneath his feet. But I'll be revenged. No, no, no! they're too bad," she sobbed; "but I couldn't stoop to that."

Mrs. Berens subsided into an easy-chair, to go on reddening her eyes; while the doctor accompanied his friends to the Rectory, and stopped chatting for a few minutes, but refused another invitation to dine even when Mary Salis and Leo both added their persuasions.

"No," he said, "I've promised old Moredock his dose, and I'm going to see that he has it." And then, after a few kindly words to Mary concerning her health—words that were almost tender, but which seemed to burn and sear the poor girl, as she read them aright—he went away, to hurry to his surgery in the Manor House.

"I'm very glad, for poor old Hartley's sake, that the affair's all off. It is, evidently; for Madam Leo seemed as cool as could be, and she's as handsome and ladylike a girl as a man need wish to call wife. Humph! I'll give him a little chloral—just a suspicion—to calm him down. Poor old boy! and he thinks he's going to die. Well, it's my theory," he continued, as he compounded the sexton's mixture and carefully

corked it up; "and, think about it from whichever point I may, it seems to be quite right. There, Master Moredock, there's your dose. That will lay any ghost in the United Kingdom, given sufficiently strong!"

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW HORACE NORTH DID NOT GO TO THE MEET.

"What a morning for a run with the hounds!" said Horace North, as he stood at the door of the fine old Manor House, where he had come to cool himself, after a scene with Mrs. Milt, his housekeeper, owing to a committee of ways and means.

Mrs. Milt had wanted to have everything her way. The doctor had shown a desire to have everything his way, and the approach of the two forces had resulted in an explosion.

"Candlish offered me a mount, and I've a good mind to take the offer, just for once. A good gallop would do me a world of good.

No; I'll go and have a chat with old Moredock, see Mrs. Berens, Biddy Tallis, and Brown's baby, and then settle down to a good, quiet study. Hah!"

Horace North was dubious. A slight puff upon his vane would have sent it in either direction, and it seemed as if the decisive puff came just then in the shape of something as light as air. For there was the sound of hoofs; and directly after, looking exceedingly handsome in her tightly-fitting riding-habit and natty hat, Leo Salis passed on her pretty mare.

She caught sight of him, and returned a coquettish nod and smile to his low bow, but did not draw rein, though she must have seen his intention to hurry down to the gate; cantering gently on, as charming a specimen of early womanhood as ever rode gracefully upon a well-bred mare.

"By George! that settles it," said the doctor. "Where's the meet?"

He hurried in, snatched up the county paper, and found that it was at Fir Tree Hill, four miles beyond the Hall.

"The very thing," he cried. "I'll just get on my boots, and walk over to the Hall, get my mount, and go on. No, I won't; I'll drive."

He rang the bell, and Mrs. Milt—a very severe-looking, handsome, elderly lady—in the whitest of caps, bibs, and tuckers, appeared frowning, as if still charged with the remaining clouds of the late storm.

"Tell Dick to put the horse in the chaise."

Mrs. Milt tightened her lips, and made parallel lines in her forehead, but did not stir.

"Well?" said the doctor.

"Well?" said Mrs. Milt.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Perfectly," said Mrs. Milt.

"Then, why don't you do it? And for Heaven's sake, my dear Mrs. Milt, let's have no more of this petty squabbling. Discharge cook; have a fresh house-maid; paper and clean up, and do whatever you please, but don't bother me."

"It is not my wish to bother you,

Dr. North," said the lady austerely, and with considerable emphasis on the word, "bother."

"Very well, then, let's have peace. Such a scene as we had this morning interferes with my studies. Now, go and tell him to put to the horse."

"Will you be good enough to tell me how, Dr. North?"

"What do you mean?"

"You sent your man in that chaise to fetch some drugs from King's Hampton."

"Hah! so I did. He ought to be back by now. Yes; there are wheels."

"The carrier," said Mrs. Milt.

"Pish! of course. Never mind, I'll walk. There's something else coming," he said, listening. "Yes; that's the chaise. Go and tell Dick not to take out the horse, but to come round here."

"He's coming round," said Mrs. Milt, going to the window; "and there's a gentleman with him."

The doctor looked up hastily, and frowned, as he caught sight of a dark, sleek-looking

personage, about to descend from the chaise; while, as Mrs. Milt went to open the door, Horace North exclaimed to himself:

"Now, why in the world is it that Nature will set one against one's relations, and above all against Cousin Thompson, for——"

"Ah! my dear Horace, this was very good and thoughtful of you," exclaimed the object of his thoughts, entering the room with extended hands.

"Ah! Thompson, glad to see you," said the doctor, innocently enough—for the lie was from habit, not intentional—"but you are not cyanide of potassium!"

"Sure I'm not, indeed; but I want to consult you."

"I sent in my man for a portion of that unpleasant chemical; not to meet you."

"Well, it doesn't matter, my dear boy. I was coming down, and I saw your chaise; and I know you like me to make myself at home, so give me some breakfast."

"Yes, of course. Run down this morning?"

"Yes, by the six-thirty from Paddington. Early bird gets the first pick, you know."

"There goes my gallop," groaned the doctor, as a mental vision of Leo Salis appeared before him, while he rang the bell.

"Not ill, are you? Come to consult me?"

"No, I'm not ill; but I have come to consult you, my dear Horace."

"Did you ring, sir?"

"Yes, Mrs. Milt; my cousin would like some breakfast."

"I am getting it ready, sir; but it can't be done in two minutes and a half."

"No, no, of course not, Mrs. Milt. Thank you. Send word when it's ready."

"I'll bring word myself, sir," said Mrs. Milt austerely.

"No, don't trouble, my dear Mrs. Milt," said Cousin Thompson, who looked so sleek in skin and black cloth that he shone; "a cup of coffee and a sole, cutlet—anything."

"Sole! cutlet! My dear fellow, this isn't London. Give him some ham and eggs, Mrs. Milt," said the doctor. "Now, old fellow," he continued, as the door closed after the housekeeper a little more loudly

than was necessary, "business: what's the matter? Liver?"

"No, no, my dear Horace. I'm quite well. To consult you about Mrs. Berens."

The doctor pushed back his chair.

"Why, how surprised you look! You recommended her to come to me about her money affairs."

"Oh! Ah! Yes, of course; so I did. She asked me to give her the name of a London solicitor, and so I gave her yours — my cousin's."

"It was very good of you, Horace, for I am a poor man," said the visitor sleekly. "Far be it from me to quarrel with Uncle Richard's apportionment of his money, but——"

"There, for goodness' sake, don't bring that up again! You know why the old man excluded you."

"Yes. I had the misfortune to offend him, Horace," said the visitor with a sigh.

"And now what about Mrs. Berens?"

"Ah, yes; a very simple matter. You are a great friend of hers?"

"I am her doctor."

"Yes, yes," said the other, with an unpleasant chuckle, which made North long to kick him; "but if report is true, you are going to marry the handsome widow."

"Then report is not true," said North angrily. "Now to business."

"Well, the fact is this," said the visitor; "in my capacity of confidential solicitor to several people, I often have to give advice, and to raise money."

"No doubt," said the doctor drily.

"I have a client now who wants rather a heavy sum upon the security of some leasehold houses. Mrs. Berens has money lying in the Three per Cents., and I thought that you, as her friend, might advise her. She would get six per cent. instead of three, and a word from you——"

"Will never induce a lady patient of mine to run any risks," said the doctor shortly.

"Risks?"

"Breakfast's ready," said the doctor abruptly, and he led the way into the other room. Having sufficient wisdom not to recommence the attack, Cousin Thompson

contented himself with breakfasting heartily, but he was not pleasant over his feeding; and, what was more, he had a way of bringing into every room he entered an odour of mouldy parchment.

After breakfast Cousin Thompson had an interview with Mrs. Berens; and after that, without consulting his cousin, he walked across to the Hall to hold a meeting, not unconnected with money matters, with Tom Candlish. Had he consulted his cousin, he would have known that in all probability Tom Candlish had gone to the meet, especially as he rarely missed a run.

Consequently, Cousin Thompson returned to the doctor's, to find him chafing over his disappointment. Not that he was a hunting man; but the whim had seized him to go, and the appearance of Leo Salis had helped to make the ride more attractive than it might have appeared at another time.

"Ah, Horace, my dear fellow," he said, "I shall have to trespass on your hospitality for dinner, and then ask you to give me a bed."

"All right," said the doctor gruffly. "Give you a dose too, if you like."

"Thanks, no, unless you mean wine."

"Oh, yes, I'll give you a glass of port," said the doctor. "I hope you haven't persuaded that poor woman to invest in anything risky."

"Now, my dear Horace, what do you take me for?" cried Cousin Thompson.

"A lawyer."

"But there are good lawyers and bad lawyers."

"Well, from a legal point of view, you're a bad lawyer. I never gave you but one case to conduct for me, and that you lost."

"The barrister lost it, my dear Horace. Don't be afraid. I am not a legal pick-pocket. I might retaliate, and say you're a bad doctor."

"Well, so I am — horribly bad. The amount of ignorance that exists in my brain, sir, is truly frightful."

"But you go on curing people."

"Trying to cure people, sir, you mean. Wading about in deep water; groping in

the darkness. Thank Heaven, sir, that you were not made a doctor. Eh, what is it—some one ill?" he cried, as Mrs. Milt entered the room with a note.

"Poor somebody!" said Cousin Thompson to himself.

"Note from the Rectory, sir."

"Oh!" ejaculated the doctor; "shan't be able to go, as you are here. Wants me to play a game at chess. Salis, you know."

As he spoke he leisurely unfastened the envelope, and began to read.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Mrs. Milt, attend to my cousin as if I were here. Very sorry. Serious case," he continued, turning to his guest; and the next minute he had hurried from the house, to set off almost at a run for the Rectory.

For Hartley Salis' note was very brief, but none the less urgent, containing as it did these words:

"For Heaven's sake, come on! Leo has had a serious fall."

CHAPTER XV.

A REFRACTORY PATIENT.

Leo made light of her accident, though her shoulder was a good deal hurt, and she bore the bandaging of what was a serious wrench with the greatest fortitude. As North learned by degrees, there had been a magnificent run, but towards the last, when Leo was almost heading the field, the mare had become unmanageable, and had rushed at a dangerous jump, with the result that she fell, threw her rider on the bank of the deep little river, and, in her efforts to rise, entangled herself with Leo's habit, and rolled with her right into the water.

"A most providential escape," said Salis, who looked pale with anxiety.

"What nonsense, Hartley!" said the girl; "a bit of a bruise on the shoulder and a wetting."

"Yes, but you would have been drowned if the gentlemen of the hunt had not galloped up to your aid."

"But they always do gallop up to a lady's aid if her horse falls," said Leo, speaking excitedly. "There, don't make so much of it; and it was utterly absurd, Hartley, for you to send for a doctor for such a trifle."

"Trifle or no, Miss Salis," said the doctor, "I should advise your seeking your bed at once."

"Nonsense, Dr. North!"

"Well, then, I must insist," he said firmly.

"Oh, very well," said Leo; "I suppose you are master, so I have no more to say. A little girl has had an accident, and so they put her to bed. Fudge!"

"Leo, dear," said Mary, from her couch, "pray be advised. Dr. North would not wish it if it were not necessary."

"Certainly not," said North shortly, for

he was annoyed at Leo's flippant manner, and ready to wonder why he had felt attracted that morning.

"What nonsense, Mary!" cried Leo. "Pray don't you interfere."

Mary sighed, and remained silent.

"Well, as you please," said North. "I have given you good advice: act as you think best."

He turned to go, but was followed into the hall by the curate.

"Come into my room," said the latter, with a pained and perplexed look in his face. "This is very sad, old fellow."

"What? being guardian to a couple of giddy girls?" said the doctor petulantly. "No, no: I beg your pardon; don't take any notice of my bitter way; but really, Salis, old boy, you had better have got rid of that mare."

"Yes, I wish I had," said the curate sadly; "but Leo seems to take such pleasure in it—and who could foresee such a mishap as this?"

"I could," said the doctor shortly. "Good thing she was not killed."

"You don't think the hurt serious?

"Serious? No. Give her a good deal of pain, of course."

"And the chill?"

"What chill?"

"The plunge into the river after a heated ride."

"She changed her things at once, of course?"

"No," said the curate. "It seems that out of bravado she insisted on mounting again, and then rode slowly home. She was shivering when she came in."

"Why was I not told all this before?" said North sharply. "Look here, Salis, old fellow; she must go to bed directly, and take what I send her. Exercise your authority, or she will have a very serious cold."

He hurried away, and did not send the promised medicine, but took it himself, leaving it with emphatic instructions as to its being taken; and the result was that Leo Salis laughed at the supposed necessity, as she termed it, and calmly declined to follow out the doctor's views.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I AM NOT ILL."

Hartley Salis did not tell the doctor the whole of his trouble, neither did he say a word to Mary upon the subject; but she divined the cause of his anger as she lay helpless there, and sighed as she wished that she could set matters right.

For Tom Candlish had ridden home with Leo, and parted at the gate.

"I might have known that they would meet," said Salis, as he sat thinking; "but I never imagined that he would have the assumption to come again to the house."

But Tom Candlish had helped Leo when she was in great peril of being drowned; and as the curate learned this he felt his im-

potence, and was coldly courteous, while, on his side, Tom Candlish was defiant, almost to the point of insolence; and his manner to Leo seemed intimate enough to startle Salis, and make him wonder whether they had met since the scene at the river-side.

Hartley Salis soon had something to divert his attention from this point, for the next day Leo was not very well. She was tired, she said. It had been a very long run, but delightful all the same; and she allowed now that perhaps it would have been better if she had listened to the doctor's advice.

"I shall be quite well to-morrow," she cried. "Why, Hartley, how serious you look!"

"Do I?" he said, smiling, for he had been communing with himself as to whether he should ask Leo plainly if she had kept her word.

"Do you? Yes!" she cried angrily; and, without apparent cause, she flashed out into quite a fit of passion. "I declare it is miserable now to be at home. It is like living between two spies."

"My dear Leo!" began Salis.

"I don't care: it is. Mary here watches me as a cat does a mouse. You always follow me about whenever I stir from home; and then you two compare notes, and plot and plan together how to make my life a burden."

"Leo, dear," said Mary gently, "you are irritable and unwell, or you would not speak like this."

"I would. I am driven to it by my miserable life at home. I am treated like a prisoner."

"Leo, my child," began Salis.

"Yes, that's it—child! You treat me as if I were a child, and I will not bear it. Anything more cruel it is impossible to conceive."

"Nonsense, dear," said Salis, smiling gravely, as he took his sister's hand.

She snatched it away; not so quickly, though, but that he had time to feel that it was burning hot, as her scarlet cheeks seemed to be, while her eyes were unusually brilliant.

It was no time to question or reproach, and the curate set himself to soothe.

"Why, Leo, my dear," he said, smiling, "I shall begin to think you are cross."

"If you mean indignant," she retorted, "I am. My very soul seems to revolt against the wretched system of espionage you two have established against me."

"No, no, Leo, dear!" said Mary. "How can you say such things of Hartley, whose every thought is for your good?"

"Good—good—good!" cried Leo; "I'm sick of the very word! Be good! Be a good girl! Oh! it's sickening!"

Salis made a sign to Mary to be silent, but Leo detected it.

"There!" she cried, with her eyes flashing. "What did I say? You two are always plotting against me. Ah!"

She shivered as from a sudden chill, and drew her chair closer to the fire.

"Do you feel unwell, dear?" said Salis anxiously.

"No, *no*, no! I have told you both a dozen times over that I am quite well. It

is a cold morning, and I shivered a little. Is there anything extraordinary in that?"

"I only felt anxious about you, dear."

"Then, pray don't feel anxious, but let me be in peace."

She caught up a book, and tried to read; while, to avoid irritating her, Salis and Mary resumed their tasks—the one writing, the other busy over her needle; and to both it seemed as if they were performing penance, so intense was the desire to keep on glancing at Leo, while they felt the necessity for avoiding all appearance of noticing her.

She held her book before her, and appeared to be reading, but she did not follow a line; for the letters were blurred, and a curious, dull, aching sensation racked her from head to foot, rising, as it were, in waves which swept through her brain, and made it throb.

This, with its accompanying giddiness, passed off, and with obstinate determination she kept her place, and the pretence of reading was carried on till towards evening.

They had dined — a weary, comfortless

meal—at which Leo had taken her place, and made an attempt to eat; but it was evident to the others that the food disgusted her, and almost everything was sent untasted away.

The irritability seemed to have died out, but every attempt to draw her into conversation failed; and after a time the meal progressed in silence, till they drew round the fire at the end to resume their tasks, almost without a word.

Salis was busy over a formal report of the state of the parish for the rector. Mary was hard at work stitching, to help a poor widow who gained a precarious living by needlework, and Leo still had her book before her eyes.

Mary's were aching, and she was about to ring for the lamp, for the short December afternoon was closing in, and Salis was in the act of wiping his pen, when Leo sud denly let fall her book, to sit up rigidly, staring wildly at them.

"Leo, my child!"

"Well, what is it?" she said; and her

voice sounded harsh and strange. "Why did you say that? You knew I should say yes."

"Yes, yes, of course, my dear; but I did not speak."

"You did. You said I lied unto you, quite aloud, and" — with a return of her irritable way—"are we never going to have dinner?"

Salis rose from the table where he had been writing, and laid his hand upon his sister's arm.

"Leo, dear," he said anxiously; and he gazed in her wild eyes, which softened and looked lovingly in his.

"No," she said, as she nestled to him and laid her cheek upon his arm; "a bit of a wrench. My shoulder aches, but it will soon be well, dear."

"Lie back in your chair," said Salis, as he laid his hand upon her throbbing brow.

"Yes, that's nice," she said, smiling as she obeyed. "So cool and refreshing — so cool."

"Do you feel drowsy? Would you like to have a nap?"

"Yes, if you wish it," she said. "I am sleepy. Don't tell them at home, dear."

Salis started, and his face grew convulsed, as he exchanged glances with Mary, who read his wish, wrote a few lines in pencil, and softly rang the bell.

"Take that at once," she whispered to Dally Watlock, who entered, round-eyed and staring.

"To Mr. Tom Candlish, miss?"

"No, no, girl; to Mr. North."

Mary drew her breath hard as the door closed behind the girl, for she read in her words a tale of deceit and also who had been the messenger, perhaps, in many a love missive sent on either side.

She tried to rise, feeling that this was a time of urgent need; but her eyes became suffused with tears as she sank back helpless in her seat.

"Take my arm, Leo, dear," said Salis. "You would be better if you went up to your room and lay down."

"Yes, dear; if you wish it," she said softly; and she started up, but caught at

her brother, and clung to him as if she had been seized by a sudden vertigo, and then stared wildly round.

Salis gave Mary a nod, and then, drawing Leo's arm through his, led her up to the door of her room, which she entered while he ran quickly down.

"Quite delirious," he said quickly. "I hope North will not be long. I thought he would have been here this morning."

He was busy as he spoke preparing for a task which he had performed twice daily since Mary's convalescence. For, taking her in his arms as easily as if she had been a child, he bore her out of the room and up to Leo's door.

As Mary, trembling with anxiety, pressed it open, Leo uttered an angry cry, dashed forward, and thrust the door back in her face.

"No, no!" she said hoarsely; "not you. Let me be. Let me rest in peace."

"But Leo, dear, you are ill."

"I am not ill," she cried fiercely. "Go away!"

"Don't irritate her," whispered Salis gently. "Leo, dear, Mary will be in her own room. Lie down now."

The phase of gentleness had passed, and Leo turned upon him almost savagely, in her furious contempt.

"Lie down! Lie down! as if I were a dog! Oh! there must be an end to this. There must be an end to this."

She had partly opened the door so as to speak to her brother, but now she closed it loudly, and they heard her walking excitedly to and fro.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT DALLY WAS DOING.

"I FEARED it," said North, as he returned from the bedroom, where he had left Leo with the servants, who stood staring helplessly at her, and listening to her ravings about the mare, the plunge into the cold river, and the injured shoulder. "Violent fever and delirium. Poor girl! what could we expect? Heated with her ride, the fall, the sudden plunge into the water, and then a long, slow ride in the drenched garments."

"Do you think she is very ill?" said Mary anxiously.

"Very; but not dangerously, I hope. There, trust to me, and I will do everything I can. You must have a good nurse

at once. Those women are worse than useless. I'll send on my housekeeper."

"But you are not going?" cried Salis, with the look of alarm so commonly directed at a doctor.

"My dear boy—only to fetch medicine. I'll not be long; and mind this: she must not leave her room now. She must be kept there at any cost."

"And I am so helpless, Hartley," whispered Mary piteously. "It is so hard to bear."

The curate bent down and kissed her, and then, taking his place by the bedroom door, he remained to carry out the instructions he had received.

They were necessary, for he had not been there five minutes before the delirious girl rose from her couch, and there was an angry outcry on the part of the women. She insisted upon going to the stable to see to her mare. It was being neglected; and it was only by the exercise of force that she was kept in the room.

Before half-an-hour had passed, the doctor

was back, and quiet, firm Mrs. Milt, who put off her crotchety ways in the face of this trouble, took her place by the bedside, and with good effect; for, partly soothed by the old woman's firm management, and partly by the strong opiate the doctor had administered, Leo sank into a restless sleep, in which she kept on muttering incoherently, the only portions of her speech at all connected being those dealing with her accident, which seemed to her to be repeated again and again.

It was towards ten o'clock, as the doctor was returning by the short cut of the fields to the Rectory, after having been home for a short time, that he caught sight of a couple of figures a short distance over the stile leading down to the meadows, through which the little river ran.

"Humph!" he muttered, as, in spite of the darkness, he recognised the figures, his own steps being hushed by the moist pasture, and the couple too intent upon their conversation to hear him pass.

"Humph!" he said; "poor old More-

dock is right, perhaps, about the girl. Confounded hard upon the people to have such a scoundrel loose among them."

He half-hesitated, as if he felt that it was his duty to interfere, but there was too much earnest work at the Rectory for him to speak at a time like this. And, besides, he could not have explained why, but the thought seemed to afford him something like satisfaction, for it was evident that if Tom Candlish had stooped to court pretty Dally Watlock, the Rectory servant, everything must have long been at an end between Leo and the squire's brother, the thrashing administered by Mr. Salis having been effectual in its way.

He was extremely anxious, too, about Leo; for unconsciously a new interest was awakening in him, and he felt that no case in which he had been engaged had ever caused him more anxiety than this. So he hurried on to his patient's room, where the fever was growing more intense, and the flushed face was rolled from side to side upon the white pillow.

"Just the same, sir," said Mrs. Milt, as he asked a few eager questions. "She's been going on like that ever since you left. Isn't she very bad? Hark at her breath."

"Very bad, Milt," said the doctor gravely; "and if matters go on like this I shall send over to King's Hampton for——"

"No, no; don't you do that, sir," said the old housekeeper sharply. "If you can't save her no one can."

"Why, Milt!" exclaimed the doctor wonderingly.

"Oh! you needn't look like that, sir. I know you. It's a deal of wherrit you give me with your awkward ways and irregular hours; but I will say this for you, there isn't a cleverer doctor going."

"And yet you walked over to King's Hampton to the other doctor when you were ill."

"Well, you had put me out so just then, and I felt as if I would sooner have died than come to you."

"Ugh! you obstinate old thing," said North. "There, I'm going down to talk to

Mr. Salis for a while; then I shall come and take your place for six hours while you go and lie down."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mrs. Milt; and she tightened her lips and remained silent for a few moments, while her master re-examined his patient. Then, drawing herself up: "I may be obstinate, sir, but I think I know my duty in a case of illness. I'm here to watch by Miss Leo Salis's bedside, and here I'm going to stay."

"Mrs. Milt," said the doctor sternly, "the first duty of a nurse is to obey instructions, as you well know. Now, no more talking, but sit down till I return."

Mrs. Milt looked tighter than ever, and her rigid stay-bone gave a crack, but she obeyed; while the doctor went down to where Salis and Mary were anxiously awaiting his report.

"I meant to have had some tea ready for you," said Mary, after hearing what he had to say; "but Dally is missing. She must have gone to her grandfather's cottage."

The doctor uttered a loud "Humph!" and then remarked that he could wait.

He had to wait some time, as Dally had gone to keep an appointment in the meadows, and had come upon a figure leaning against a great willow pollard on the river's brink.

The figure started forward out of the darkness and caught her arm, with the result that Dally uttered a little affected squeal.

"La, Mr. Candlish! how you made me jump!"

"Why, what brings you here?" he cried, passing his arm round the girl's waist.

"Now, do adone, sir; you've no business to touch me like that. What would Joe Chegg say?"

"That I was a wise man, and that it was the prettiest little waist in Duke's Hampton."

"Please keep your fine speeches for Miss Leo, and talk about her waist, sir, and let me go. I only come for a walk."

"Nonsense! tell me. You've got a message?"

"No, I haven't."

"You—you have a letter?"

"No," said Dally, shaking her head, and struggling just a little for appearance' sake.

"Is she coming, then?"

"No, she isn't; for she's too ill."

"Eh? Nonsense!"

"But indeed she is, sir, and confined to her bed."

"And she sent you, Dally. Oh! how good of her."

"No, nor she didn't send me neither, Mr. Candlish; and do let go. You shouldn't."

"Has she caught a cold, Dally?"

"Horrid bad one; and she's gone right off her head."

"Gammon!"

"She has, indeed, sir; and me and cook had to hold her down: she was so bad."

"Hold her down?"

"Yes; and she kept on talking in a hurry like, all about the hunting and falling in the water."

"Did she say anything about me?" said Tom Candlish eagerly.

"About you? I should think not, indeed.

You men seem to think that ladies are always thinking about you. Such stuff!"

Then a long amount of whispering took place, Tom Candlish being one of those gentlemen who never fret after the absent, but possess a sailor-like power of taking the good the gods provide.

At the end of five minutes there was the sound of a smart smack—not a kiss, but the contact of a palm upon a cheek.

Then, from out the darkness came the expression, "You saucy jade!" following upon the rush of feet in flight.

A minute later the swing gate leading into the Rectory grounds was heard to clap to, and Tom Candlish stopped in his pursuit and walked home across the fields.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEO MAKES A CONFESSION.

"Yes, doctor, I'm better, and you needn't come again."

"Yes, you're better, Moredock. Seen any more ghosts?"

"Nay; I never see no ghosts. I only see what I did see; but how's young miss up yonder?"

Horace North's brow wrinkled, and his voice sounded stern.

"Ill, Moredock—seriously ill. Violent fever."

"Fever—fever!" said the old man, backing away with unwonted excitement.

"Yes, fever, you selfish old rascal!" cried the doctor irascibly. "You oughtn't to be

afraid of catching a fever at your time of life."

"But I am, doctor—I am," said the old man, with a peculiar change in his voice. "You see, I've just been ill, and it would be very hard to be ill again. Is—is it ketching?"

"No!" roared the doctor angrily; "not at all. There, take care of yourself, and don't go to the church again in the dark."

"I shall go to the church as often as I like and when I like," grumbled the old man. "It's my church; but, I say, doctor, is it likely to be—eh?—you know—job for me?"

North looked at him with an expression of horror and loathing that made the old man stare.

"Why, you hideous old ghoul!" he cried; "do you want me to strangle you? Ugh!"

He hurried out of the cottage, and Moredock rose slowly and followed him as far as the door.

"What's he mean by that? Gool? What's a gool? He's been drinking. I see his hand shake; that's what's the

matter with him; and I'm glad he hasn't got to mix no physic for me this morning. Now, I wonder what he takes. Them doctors goes into their sudgeries, and mixes theirselves drops as makes 'em on direckly. Old Borton used to, and I buried him. He's making a bad job of it up at the Rectory, and he's drinking, but I put him out by speaking of it. Ay, there he goes in at the Rect'ry gate. Wonder whether they'll have a tomb for her, or a plain grave."

Leo Salis had looked for some hours past as if one or the other would be necessary, and Moredock's words had seemed to North as if each bore a sting.

So bad was the patient that when he reached the Rectory that day he decided to stay.

"I'd say, send for other advice directly, Salis," he said drearily; "but if you had the heads of the profession here, they could do nothing but wait. The fever will run its course. We can do nothing but watch."

"And pray," said Salis sternly.

"And pray," said the doctor, repeating

his words. "Will you send over to the town, and telegraph?"

"No," replied the curate. "I have confidence in you, North."

He said no more, but turned into his study to hide his emotion, while North crossed to where poor helpless Mary lay back in her chair, looking white and ten years older as her eyes sought his, dumbly asking for comfort.

He took her hand, and kissed it, retaining it in his for a few minutes, as he stood talking to her, trying to instil hope, and little thinking of the agony he caused.

"I'll go to her now," he said. "There, try and be hopeful and help me to cheer up poor Hartley. He wants comfort badly. I'll come and tell you myself if there is any change."

"The truth," said Mary faintly.

"The truth? Yes: to you," he said meaningly; and his words seemed to convey that she was so old in suffering that she could bear to be told anything, though perhaps it might be withheld from her brother.

Mrs. Milt, who had been an untiring watcher by the sick-bed, made her report—one that she had had to repeat again and again—of restless mutterings and delirium; otherwise no change.

"No, Mrs. Milt, we have not reached the climax yet," said North, sighing.

"There, go and lie down, my good soul," he added after a short examination; "you must be tired out."

"Tired, but not tired out, sir," said the old lady. "Poor child! she has something on her mind, too, which frets her."

"Indeed!" said North.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Milt, in a whisper. "She keeps muttering about telling *him* something — confessing, she calls it sometimes."

"Some old trouble come up into her brain," said the doctor; and he sat down by the bedside, to gaze at Leo's flushed face as she lay there with her eyes half closed, apparently sleeping heavily now.

"Not yet, not yet," sighed North, as he took the hot, dry hand in his, and a shiver

ran through him as he thought of the old sexton's words, and wondered whether he would be able to save her—so young and beautiful—from so sad a fate.

"Poor child!" he said, half aloud; and then he sat on, hour after hour, wondering whether it would be possible to do more; whether he had done everything that medical skill could devise; and finally, as he came to the conclusion that he had thoroughly done his duty by his patient, his heart sank, and he owned to himself that in some instances he and the rest of the disciples of the great profession were singularly impotent, and merely attendants on Nature's will.

Salis came up from time to time, to enter the room softly, and mutely interrogate his friend, and then go sadly back to his study—where Mary sat with him—to give her such news as he had to bear, and join with her in watching and praying for the wilful sister they both so dearly loved.

It was getting towards nine o'clock on the

gloomy, stormy winter's night when, after softly replenishing the fire, as North was returning to his place by the bed, he heard a faint sigh, and bending down over his patient, he found that her eyes were wide open—not in a fixed, delirious stare, full of excitement, but calm and subdued, while a sweet smile passed into her expression as his face neared hers.

"Is that dreadful old woman there?" she whispered.

"No," he said, laying his hand upon her forehead. "I am alone."

"Then I will speak," she said, in a low, passionate voice. "You have not known—you have not believed it possible—but tell me, I have been very ill?"

"Yes," he said gently, "you have been ill; but don't talk—try and rest."

"I have been very ill, and I may die, and then you would never know," she whispered quickly. "It is no time, then, for a foolish, girlish reserve. I may have been light and frivolous—coquettish too — but beneath it

all I have loved you, and you alone. I do love you with all my heart."

Two soft, white arms were thrown about Horace North's neck, to draw him closer to his patient's gently heaving breast.

CHAPTER XIX.

WAS IT DELIRIUM?

"Leo, my child, think what you are saying," cried North.

"I do think. I have lain here and thought for hours. I am not ashamed to confess it. Why should I be?"

She looked up at him inquiringly; while he for the moment felt giddy with emotion, but recovered himself directly.

"She is delirious, poor child," he said to himself; and he tried to remove the enlacing arms from his neck.

"No, no; don't leave me," she said softly. "Don't be angry with me for saying this."

"I am not angry, but you are weak.

You have been very ill, and you must not be excited now."

"No, I am not excited. I only feel happy —so happy. You are not angry?"

"Angry? No," he said tenderly. "There, let me lay you back upon your pillow. Try and sleep."

"No. I do not wish to sleep. Only tell me once again that you are not cross, and then sit down by me, and let me hold your hand."

"Poor girl!" muttered North, as he felt the hands which had clasped his neck steal down his arm softly and lingeringly, as if they delighted in its strength and muscularity, resting for a few moments upon his wrist, and then grasping his hand tightly, while their owner uttered a low sigh of satisfaction.

He seated himself by the bedside, and Leo said softly, as she lay gazing into his eyes:

"I feel so happy and restful now."

"And as if you can sleep?"

"Sleep? No. Let me lie and look at

you. Don't speak. I want to think. Shall I die?"

"Die? No; you must get better now, and grow strong, for Mary's sake and for Hartley's."

"And for yours," said Leo softly, as she smiled lovingly in his face. "I shall be your wife if I live."

"You shall live, and grow to be happy with all who love you."

"Yes," she said softly, "with all who love me;" and she closed her eyes.

"It *is* delirium, poor child," said North to himself. "Good heavens! am I such a scoundrel as to think otherwise?"

He sat back in his chair startled by the thoughts which had surged up to his brain. He was horrified. For, in spite of medical teaching, of his thorough command over himself, and of the fact that he had always been one whose love was his profession, he had found that he was strongly moved by the words and acts of the beautiful girl who had seemed to be laying bare the secrets of her heart.

"Delirium—delirium! the workings of a

distempered brain," he said to himself fiercely. "Good heavens! am I going to be delirious too?"

At that moment Leo opened her eyes again, with a calm, soft light seeming to burn therein, as she smiled in his face and drew his hand more to her pillow so that she could rest her cheek upon it, and once more her eyes half closed; but he knew that she was gazing at him still with the same soft, loving look which, in spite of his self-control, made his heart beat with a dull, heavy throb.

"I have so longed to tell you all this," she whispered; "but I never dared till now. It has made me bitter, and distant, and strange to you. I was angry with myself for loving you; and yet I could not help it. You made me love you. I always did—I always shall."

"It is delirium," panted North. "I will not listen to her. Pah! it is absurd. Where is my manliness—where are all my honourable feelings?" I can master such folly, and I will."

He set his teeth, and his face grew hard and cold; but all the same his pulses quickened, and as he sat prisoned there, with those soft, lustrous eyes gazing into his, he found that he was dreaming of another life in which his scientific researches would be forgotten in the sweet, dreamy, sensuous existence which would be his—enlaced in that loving embrace, while those eyes gazed in his as they were gazing now, and those curved lips returned his kisses or murmured tenderly as once more they whispered the secrets of her breast.

"It has been so long. I have been so ill; but I do not complain, for it has made me free to speak to you as I speak now. No, no; don't take away your hand. Let me rest like that."

He was softly stealing away his hand, but she clung to it the more tightly, and her white teeth glistened between her ruby lips in a smile that was half mocking.

He heaved a deep sigh, and resigned himself to his position, while the new thoughts which came surging on in a flood began to

sweep everything before them. She had been delirious, but there was no delirium here. She loved him. This young and beautiful girl, to whom for years he had given no thought save as the sister of his old friend, loved him passionately, and he knew now the meaning of the ideas which had troubled him for days—he must—he did love her in return.

But he was not beaten yet. A flush rose to his forehead and he set his teeth hard, as he recalled his position—the confidence reposed in him as a medical man—a confidence which he seemed to be abusing; and drawing his breath deeply, he resolved that he would be man enough to resist this temptation now Leo was weak and excited. She was yielding to her impulse as she would not have yielded had she been strong and well; hence he would be taking an unmanly advantage if he trespassed upon her weakness now.

His course was open; his mind clear. He would be tender and kind to her now. After she was well he could listen to her confessions of love as a lover should; and as the

thought expanded in his brain that he would call this loving girl wife, he wondered how it was that he could have been so dull and cold before—how it was that love should have been shut from his mental vision as by a veil? And he sat gazing at his patient, almost dazzled by the bright light which seemed to be shed upon his future, till Hartley softly entered the room.

"Any change?" he whispered.

North glanced at the bed, and his heart beat fast. Leo was again sleeping uneasily, and muttering in a low whisper. To an ordinary observer there seemed to be none, but to Horace North there was an enormous change, and he asked himself whether he should speak now or wait.

He could not speak then of the subject nearest to his heart. He and Salis had always been the most intimate of friends—almost brothers—and they would be quite brothers in the future; but he could not tell him then.

"She seems calmer," he whispered. "She was awake and talking a little while ago."

"What—lucidly—sensibly?"

In spite of himself North could not help a start as he turned and met his friend's eye, while his words were slow and constrained as he said, in a hesitating manner:

"Yes; I think so. But she is very weak." And the mental question insisted upon being heard—Was she speaking sensibly, and as one in the full possession of her senses?

"North, old fellow, this is great news," cried the curate. "Heaven be thanked! I must go and tell Mary."

He was hurrying from the room, but his friend caught his arm.

"No, no; not yet," he said hurriedly. "I would not raise her hopes too much."

"Not when she is starving for the merest crumb of comfort? I must tell her."

"Then be content to say I think she is a trifle better," whispered North.

"But the climax must have come and gone?"

"I—I am not sure. The case is peculiar. Do as I say, and give her the crumb of

comfort of which you spoke. To-morrow, perhaps, I can speak more definitely."

Hartley Salis left the room, and North once more bent over the bed. His heart beat, his pulses throbbed, and the nerves in his temples seemed to tingle, as he laid his hand upon the burning brow, placed a finger upon the wrist, where the pulse beat so hard and pitifully, while, when he softly raised one of the blue-veined eyelids and gazed at the pupil, he drew back slowly, and shaded the sick girl's face from the light.

It was growing late, the wind howled mournfully about the house, and from time to time there was a soft, patting noise at the window, as of some one tapping the panes with finger-tips. So high was the wind without that the candle flames were at times wafted to and fro.

Horace North had left the bedside, and was standing with his foot upon the fender, gazing down into the tiny glowing caverns in the fire, where the cinders fell together from time to time with a peculiar musical

sound—the sound that strikes a watcher's ear so strangely in the long hours of the night.

His thoughts were wild, and a tempest was raging in his breast as furious as that without. Love had made its first attack upon a strong man, and the wound was rankling. His brain was confused. He was almost giddy with his new sensations, astonished at the position in which he found himself.

He had been keen enough man of the world to understand Mrs. Berens' tender, shrinking advances, and they had been to him by turns a cause of annoyance and of mirth. But this was a novel and an intense delight. He could not have believed that he could be so moved.

It was a hard fight, but the man of honour won.

"I am her brother's friend; I am her medical attendant," he mused; "and neither by word nor look will I betray what passes in my heart till she is well. Then I, too, will lay bare the secret I shall hide."

"And if she speaks to you again as she spoke awhile ago—what then?"

It was as if a soft voice had whispered those words in his ear, and he shivered as he asked himself, "What shall I say?"

"It is all madness," he cried fiercely—"utter madness. They were the outpourings of her diseased brain. Am I growing into an idiot? Has much study of the occult wonders of our life half turned my brain?"

He walked quickly to the bed, took up the candle, and let its light fall upon the flushed face for a few moments, a face looking so beautifully attractive with its wealth of rich hair tossed away over the white pillow.

He set down the candle, and pressed his hand softly once more upon her burning brow, listening the while to the dull throbbings of his heart.

"Yes, Horace North," he said at last, "you, the much-praised would-be *savant*, are as weak as the weakest of your sex, ready to be flattered into a passion by the first

sweet words which fall from a woman's lips. You are strong in knowledge, you have mastered endless difficulties, but you have not mastered Horace North."

"Fool—fool—fool!" he whispered to himself, after a pause; "with all your study to be so ready to rush to such a belief—ready to forget the trust reposed in you by a true man, by his sweet-minded sister, and, as it were, by you, my poor helpless girl. Spoken in your wild delirium, my child—the emanations of a young girl's brain, of one whose waking thoughts must, Nature taught, be almost always of who is to be your mate through life. You opened the secret casket of your heart, my child, when helpless and without control, and I have gazed therein with prying eyes. But sleep in peace; they shall be secrets still. Yes," he added, once more, as he drew steadily back—"delirium: she knows not what she says."

A sigh from the sleeper made him pause, and then a low, musical laugh rang out, followed by a quick muttering.

Then once more the low laugh was heard, and the muttering became louder—then plainly heard, as if the speaker were in a merry protesting mood.

"You ask so much. Again? Well, I will confess. Yes, I do love you—with all my poor weak heart!"

CHAPTER XX.

A VENERABLE OLD MAN.

"No, Moredock, I am not going to find more fault, and I am not going to complain to the rector. If you had been a young man, with chances of getting work elsewhere, I should have had you discharged at once."

"Ay, discharged at once," said the old man, trying to bite his livid lip with one very yellow old tooth, as he stood in the vestry doorway, looking down at the curate.

"But as you are a venerable old man——"

"Gently, Parson Salis; a bit old, but not venerable," grumbled the sexton.

"——I shall look over it, and not disturb you for the short time you have to live upon this earth. But——"

"Now, don't go on like that, sir, and don't get talking about little time on earth. I may live a many years."

"I hope you will, Moredock," said the curate, taking out the cigar-case he had started at North's recommendation, and carefully selecting a cigar before replacing it; "and I hope you will bitterly repent. If you had come to me and asked me I would have given you a bottle of wine, but for a trusted servant of the church to take advantage of his position and steal——"

"On'y borri'd it, sir."

"I say steal, Moredock. It was a wicked theft," said Salis sternly. "The wine kept here for sacramental purposes——"

"But it was only in the cupboard."

"It was a wicked theft, sir."

"And it's poor sweet stuff; no more like the drop o' port Squire Candlish give me than treacle and water's like gin."

"You're a scoundrelly old reprobate, Moredock."

"No, I arn't, parson. I'm a good old sarvant o' the church. Here have I been

ill, as doctor'll tell you, and I was took bad in the church o' Saturday, and you'd ha' done the same, and took a drop o' the wine."

"And you've been taken bad Saturday after Saturday for months past, eh, sir?" said the curate sternly.

"Been out of order for a long bit, sir," grumbled Moredock, shuffling from foot to foot like a scolded schoolboy.

"You old scoundrel!" said the curate, half rising from his seat in the dim vestry, where the surplices and gowns, hung against the old oak panels, seemed like a jury listening to the sexton's impeachment. "You old scoundrel!" he said again, shaking the cigar at him, as if it were a little staff. "It's quite a year since I began missing the wine, and I would not—I could not—suspect you. Why, I should as soon have thought that you would rob the alms box."

The old man started, as if his guilty conscience needed no accuser, for he had more than once helped himself to a silver coin from the box within the south door, telling himself that the alms were for the poor, and

that he was one of that extremely large fringe of rags upon civilisation.

"Well," continued the curate, "I shall to some extent condone this very serious offence, Moredock, for I cannot find it in my heart to prosecute an old man of over ninety; so now go, and I sincerely hope that you will repent."

"Ay, I'll repent, parson; but it wouldn't ha' been much loss to ha' been turned out o' being saxton. Nobody dies now, and no one gets married. How's Miss Leo?"

"Getting quite strong again."

"That's a blessing, sir," grumbled the old man, who in spirit abused the young girl for defrauding him of certain fees. "Health's a blessing, sir."

"Yes, Moredock, it is," said the curate, rising.

"And I thankye kindly, sir, for looking over the wine, I do. You needn't lock it up. I won't touch it again.'

"I shall not lock it up, Moredock. My forgiveness is full. I shall trust you as if this had never occurred."

"Thankye, parson. That's han'some."

"But let me have no more complaints. You must do your duty, as I try to do mine."

"Ay, parson, and I will," said the old sexton, following his superior to the door leading out to the churchyard, where Salis stopped and took a box of vestas from his pocket, as he stood just outside the old stone doorway, where a stone corbel with a demoniacal expression of countenance seemed to be leering by his shoulder as if in enjoyment of what had taken place.

It was a sheltered corner for lighting a cigar, and the curate, without pausing to think, struck a match, and began to puff out the smoke.

"Well, I've no right to speak, as between parson and sax'on, sir; but twix' old man and young man, I do say—what would you ha' said to me if you'd ketched me having a pipe in the churchyard?"

"Why, you old rascal, I've often seen you smoking when you've been digging a grave."

"Not often, parson; because one never hardly gets a grave to dig. I have had a pipe sometimes when my chesty has felt a bit weak."

"I deserve your reproof, Moredock," said the curate, putting out his cigar. "I have taken to smoking so much that I find myself lighting cigars at all times and seasons, and I am greatly to blame here."

"Nay, nay, I shan't say no more," said the old man, calmly taking the place of reprover instead of being reproved; "but try a pipe, parson. Worth a dozen cigars. Stop a moment, sir, I wants another word with you."

"Yes. What about?"

"My gran'child, Dally, parson. I arn't saddersfied there."

"Why, Moredock?"

"Because I don't think you looks arter her morals as you should. 'Send her to me, Moredock,' you says, 'and me and the young ladies will take every care on her."

"I did, Moredock; and we have."

"Nay, you haven't, sir; or else she wouldn't go on as she do."

"What do you mean, man?"

"Along o' young Tom Candlish, squire's brother, sir."

"Is this true?"

"True, sir? Course it is. Don't I say so? I've ketched 'em together over and over again."

"Tut—tut—tut! this must be stopped," cried Salis angrily. "Did you speak to him?"

"Ay, I spoke to him."

"What did he say?"

"Called I an old fool."

"But your grandchild. Did you speak to her?"

"Ay, course I did; but you might as well talk to yon cobble. She just laughed, and give her pretty head a toss. She is a pretty gal, parson."

"Far too pretty, Moredock."

"Oh! I don't know 'bout that, sir. Think young Tom wants to marry her? I'll put down a hundred pound the day she's wed."

"You will, Moredock? Why, I thought you were very poor."

"So I am, parson, so I am; but I've saved up for the gal. But you keep her in more; it'll make him more hungry arter her, and I'd like to see her mistress up at the Hall."

"Moredock!" cried the curate, in horrible perplexity.

"Well, I should," said the old man, grinning. "Squire's drinking hisself to death as fast as he can, and he won't marry; so young Tom's sure to get the place. But you keep her in."

"I will, Moredock," said the curate sternly, and, in grave perplexity at the loose ideas of morality existing in Duke's Hampton, he went straight home, to find the doctor seated by Mary's couch.

CHAPTER XXI.

"SOMETHING PARTICULAR TO SAY."

HORACE NORTH had sternly determined on self-repression, and, from the moment when the crisis of Leo's fever had left her utterly prostrate, he had set himself the almost superhuman task of saving her from the grave.

He had treated his patient with a gentleness and care that gradually won upon her, harsh and distant as she was by nature; so that at last, after the first fits of wearing fretfulness were over, she began to greet him with a welcoming smile, and seemed happier when he sat down and stayed chatting to her by her bed.

On that night when the passionate avowals

had been uttered she had sunk back into a violent fit of delirium; and since then, in all his long hours of watching, no word of love had passed her lips—no kindly look her eyes.

North was disappointed and touched to the quick, for he watched for her loving looks, listened for her tender words.

On the other hand, in his calmer moments he was pleased, for it made his task the lighter. He could repress himself until such time as his patient were well and he could honourably approach her to ask her to be his wife.

He was not surprised at her petulance or her irritability; and even in her worst moods he only smiled, as he thought of her past sufferings and present weakness. This child-like temper was the natural outcome of such a fever, and would soon pass away.

"It is better as it is," he said, and he toiled away, neglecting his studies, his great discovery, all for Leo's sake, that she might live and grow strong once more.

"How beautiful!" he thought; and as she unconsciously suffered his attentions,

receiving them as her right, as if she were a queen, Mary drank in all, and read the doctor's heart to the very deepest cell.

But she made no sign. It was her lot to suffer, and she would bear all in silent patience to the end, working to make others happy if she could, but sorrowing the more, as she wished well to North, and tried to believe that, after all, Leo might change, and worthily return his love.

For, after seeing her home, Tom Candlish sent twice to know how Leo was. After that he seemed to take no further notice, though he really spent his time in asking Dally Watlock about her mistress, as he called it—questions which took a long time to ask and longer to gain replies.

Leo never mentioned his name, but lay back reading, setting aside the book wearily when any one seemed disposed to converse, and taking up the book again as soon as whoever it was had done.

Salis entered the room where North was seated conversing with Mary, whose pinched face bore a slight colour as she listened to

his words, something he was saying being interrupted by the brother's entrance.

"Ah, here you are!" cried North warmly. "I have stayed to see you, for I have something particular to say."

"That's right. At least, it is not bad news, I hope."

"I hope good," said the doctor warmly, and then he stopped awkwardly.

It had all seemed so easy to say in his own room. Here it was terrible.

Mary's heart began to flutter, and a piteous look came into her eyes; but she closed them gently, and a tear slowly welled through from each.

"Well, what is it? Nothing fresh about Tom Candlish, I hope?"

"About him? No; nonsense! I wanted to tell you that there is no further need for me to attend your sister," said the doctor clumsily. "She is nearly well now, and——"

"My dear Horace, you have saved her life!"

"No, no; nonsense! Only did as any other medical man would have done."

"I say she owes you her life, and it will be Leo's duty to remember that, and to strive henceforth to render back to you——"

"If she only will!" cried North excitedly, as he sprang up and clasped his old friend's hand.

For the ice was broken. He could speak now, and as Mary looked up through a mist of blinding tears he seemed to her like the hero she had always painted—as the man whom some day she might love. But for her love was dead.

"Why, Horace, old man, what do you mean?" cried Salis, as Mary fought down a wail of agony which strove to escape her lips.

"What do I mean, Salis?" cried the doctor passionately; "why, that I love Leo dearly, and I ask you to let me approach her, and beg her to be my wife."

The curate sank into the nearest chair, and sat gazing up at his friend.

"Why, you don't seem—— I had hoped —— Hartley, old fellow, don't look at me like that."

"I am very sorry."

"No, no; don't speak in that way—so cold and bitter."

"Have you spoken to Leo — of your love?"

"Not a word. On my honour."

A sigh escaped Mary.

"You need not say your honour, Horace, old fellow," said the curate sadly. "I did once hope this, but that time has gone by, and I can only say again I am very sorry."

"But why?—why?"

"Because," said the curate slowly, "Leo is not the woman to make you a happy husband."

"Nonsense, my dear boy. I—I believe she loves me."

The curate shook his head.

"Ah! well," cried the young doctor joyously; "we shall see. Tell me this: would you accept me as your brother?"

"I already look upon you as a brother."

"Then you will let me speak to Leo?"

The curate paused a few moments, and then in the gravest of tones said:

"Yes."

"Now? At once?"

"If you wish it," said Salis, after another pause.

"Then I will," said North. "I have waited months, and borne agonies all through her illness. Now I will be at rest."

"But——"

Salis was too late, for hot, excited, and strung up hard to the highest pitch of excitement, North strode from the room, while Salis stooped over Mary and kissed her.

"I am very sorry," he repeated: and a couple of loving arms closed round his neck, as Mary sobbed gently upon his breast.

Then brother and sister sat talking, for the drawing-room door had closed, and they could hear the low, dull murmurings of the doctor's voice.

He had entered the drawing-room, where, looking extremely beautiful in her *négligée* habit, and refined by illness, Leo lay upon her couch by the fire, for the spring was

cold, and as he entered she lowered her book and smiled.

It was a good augury, and with beating heart Horace North advanced and took her hand—to ask this woman to be his wife.

CHAPTER XXII.

DR. NORTH PROPOSES.

As Horace North took the hand of Leo Salis in his, it was to find it soft and cool and moist—very different from the burning palm he had so often held a few months since. It was without a tremble, but it sent a thrill through him; and with eyes flashing and revelling in his new joy, he was about to speak, when she half threw herself back in her chair with a movement of resignation which came upon him like a *douche*.

He knew it so well. He read it and understood it as plainly as if she had spoken. It was the patient waiting for him to feel her pulse.

"I thought you had given me up," she said lightly.

"Given you up—you whom I love!"

Those were the words he wanted to say, but they would not come now after the damping he had received, and involuntarily his fingers glided slowly to her wrist, and he held them pressed against the calmly-beating pulse, gazing down at her half-averted eyes the while.

There was no coquetry, no playful manner; she was as calm and resigned as any patient he had ever visited, and yet, time back, she had clung to him, gazed passionately into his eyes, and whispered of her love.

Was it delirium?

He could not bring himself to say; but even if it were, she must at heart have loved him, and in her abnormal state have confessed what she would sooner have died than said when well.

The moments glided by, and he still held her wrist in the most professional manner, till, apparently surprised, she raised her eyebrows, opened her languid eyes, and looked up at him.

"Well, doctor," she said, half laughing,

"loth to part with your patient? I am quite well."

He was dumb. A whirlwind of emotion was sweeping through him, as he vainly sought to shape his course. Could he tell her of her passionate avowal, or would it be too cowardly to take advantage of her past weakness?

He could not recall that—not now. Some day, perhaps, he might; but now he felt that he must approach her unarmed. She was delirious, and her brain must be a blank to all that had passed, and he would speak plainly—conventionally.

"Why, doctor," she said at last, half wonderingly, "of what are you thinking?"

"Thinking?" he said hoarsely.

"Yes; you look so serious. Surely I am not going to have a relapse?"

"Oh, no!" he cried.

"Then why do you look at me like this?"

She asked him the question so naïvely, as she half lay back in her place, that a cold chill came upon him again, and, letting her

hand fall, he took a turn to the window and back, half ready to say nothing then; but nerving himself once more, he took a chair, drew it to the lounge, and, seating himself again, took her hand.

"Another inspection, doctor?" she said, half laughingly; and then, as she met his eyes, she seemed to comprehend his meaning, and tried to withdraw her hand, but he held it tightly.

"Do you know what I want to say to you?" he said gravely.

"What you wish to say?"

"Yes. There! I cannot speak to you in set terms, but do you think I could know you as I have known, have watched by you, and tended you through all this terrible illness, with any other result? Leo, I love you! Will you be my wife?"

"Dr. North!"

Yes; her mind must be a blank. There was so much genuine surprise in her tone, such a look of astonishment in her eyes, that he knew it now without doubt, and his emotion choked him for the moment, so

great was the disappointment and despair her tone evoked.

"You wonder at it, but why should you? Listen to me, Leo——"

"No, no; stop—stop! You are too hasty. Let me think."

She put her hands to her temples, and looked at him half wonderingly, half amusedly, but to him it seemed as if she were trying to recall something, and he once more caught her hand.

"You will listen to me. You will give me your promise, Leo—dear Leo! You seem to belong to me, for I have, as it were, brought you back from the dead. Tell me you will be my wife."

She gave him a quick, keen glance that was as if full of horror and revolt, but he could not interpret it, and drew her hand towards his breast. Then, with a quick movement, and a pitying look at the man for whom she felt something approaching gratitude:

"No, no," she exclaimed; "it is impossible."

"I have spoken hastily. I have taken you by surprise," he cried. "Only tell me this: you do not hate me, Leo?"

"Hate you? Oh, no, Dr. North," she cried. "Have we not always been great friends? Have you not saved my life?"

"Let me be more than friend," he exclaimed; and a curious look came into her eyes, as he went on pouring forth in almost incoherent terms his love for her, the intense longing she had inspired. He could not interpret it—that it was full of mockery and suppressed mirth, mingled with contempt.

"You do not speak," he said, at last. "Give me some hope."

"What shall I say?" she cried. "It is too much to ask of me. You want me to promise."

"Yes," he said; "and I will wait patiently for the fulfilment of that promise."

"But I have thought so little of such a thing," she said calmly. "You have taken me so by surprise. I cannot—oh, I cannot promise."

"But I may hope?" he said.

"I cannot—I will not—promise," she said

firmly. "If I marry it must be some one who has distinguished himself, who has made himself a name among the great people of the world. I hate this humdrum life, and this dull existence in the country. The man I loved should be one of whom his fellow-men talked because he had become great and done something of which I could be proud. No, no, Dr. North; you must not ask me to promise this."

He sat gazing into her eyes, for her words had struck a chord in his breast. They seemed to rouse up in him the thoughts and theories which had been set aside during the months of her illness while she had been his only care; and with an eager burst of fervid passion in his tones, he exclaimed:

"If I distinguished myself in some way—if I set men talking about my discoveries, and made my name famous, would you listen to me then?"

The same mocking light was in her eye, the same half-contemptuous smile played for a moment about the corners of her lips, as she said, in a low voice:

"Wait and see."

"Wait? I will wait," he cried eagerly; "and you shall share my triumph. Leo, you do not know, you cannot tell, what thoughts I have—what investigations I am making into a science which is full of wonders waiting to be discovered. You have roused once more in me the great desire to win fame: to make researches that shall benefit humanity for all time to come. I can, I will, win these secrets from Nature, and we will together go hand-in-hand, learning more and more. I shall succeed!" he cried excitedly. "Ah! you smile. You do give me hope."

She did not speak, but veiled her eyes, to hide the mocking light within them.

"My darling—my love!" he exclaimed.

She drew back from his embrace.

"No, no," she said. "We are only friends."

"Yes, friends," he cried—"friends now."

"Say no more," she continued. "I am still weak, and this troubles me. Pray go now."

"Yes, I am going," he said eagerly, "to fight a hard fight. I used to think of it as for fame alone. Now it is for love—your love—the love of the woman who first taught me that I had a heart."

Raising the hand she surrendered, he kissed it tenderly, and was about to speak again, but he could not trust himself; and giving her a look full of love, trust, and devotion, he hurried back to the study, where Salis sat with Mary, waiting his return.

"Well?" said Salis, as Mary sat with pinched lips, and eyes wild with emotion.

"Congratulate me, my dear boy!" cried North excitedly.

"She has promised to be your wife?"

"No, no; I am to wait and work. She is quite right. It was assumption on my part."

"Then she has refused you?"

"Oh, no! She is quite right. She bids me do something to make me worthy of her love, and—ah! Hartley, old fellow, I did not know what life was before. There! I am the happiest fool on earth."

He turned to Mary, who was gazing at him with a look so full of pain that it would have betrayed her secret at another time. But just then the love madness was strong, and its effect sufficient to blind North, who, in his joy, raised Mary's hand and kissed it, as he had kissed her sister's.

Mary shrank at the contact of his lips with her soft, white hand; and a look of despair that she could not control shot from her lustrous eyes.

North did not see it, but Hartley Salis made a mental note thereof as the doctor exclaimed, laughing:

"There, good folks, let me go. Don't laugh at me and be too hard when I am gone."

"Hard!" said the curate sadly.

"Well, I know I'm behaving like a lunatic. I'm going away to study hard, and work myself back into a state of sanity—if I can."

He nodded and left the house; and, as the door closed, Mary closed her eyes as she sank back helplessly in her place.

"Asleep, dear?" said Hartley tenderly, a few minutes later, and he had risen from where he sat, with a dejected look upon his face.

"No, Hartley; only thinking," she said, smiling sweetly in his face.

"Thinking?"

"Of Leo."

"And so was I," he said sadly.

But Leo Salis was not thinking of brother or sister. She was writing rapidly, with a blotting-book held half open, and the book she had been reading held in the same hand, so that she could close the blotter instantly and seem to be reading if any one came.

Leo's lips formed the words she wrote:—

"It is ridiculous of you to have such jealous thoughts. He has tended me patiently as any other doctor would. I will tell you more to-morrow night, but to-day I tell you this: I think him very clever as a doctor; as an ordinary being I think him an idiot. At the old time as nearly as I can. Do be punctual this time, pray."

It was about five o'clock the next morning

that, after sitting up reading hard, and trying to recover lost time, till half-past three, North was plunged in a deep sleep, in which he dreamed that Leo was smiling in his eyes, and repeating the words she had uttered in her delirium, when there was a heavy dragging at the night-bell.

"What is it?" cried the doctor from his window.

"My young master, sir," cried the voice of the butler from the Hall.

"Taken ill?"

"Ill, sir? Oh, Heaven help us! it's worse than that!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOM CANDLISH PLAYS BADLY.

Squire Luke Candlish looked flushed and angry, as he stood facing his brother in the billiard-room, over the dining-room, at the Hall. Dinner had been ended an hour, and in company with his brother he had partaken of enough wine for three ordinary men, after which they had gone upstairs to smoke and play two or three games.

Tom Candlish played horribly that night. The strokes he made were vile; and so transparent were some of his blunders that any one but Squire Luke would have seen and asked what it meant.

Squire Luke only chuckled and smoked, and spilled the cigar-ash over the green

cloth and played; but played more vilely than his brother, with the result that, in spite of all his efforts, Tom won game after game.

It was very awkward, for Tom had a request to make, and unless he could get his brother in a good temper, the request would certainly be in vain.

He made misses and his brother scored one each time. Then went straight into the pocket without touching a ball; and his opponent scored three; but directly afterwards, when his turn came round, the balls seemed as if they would make cannons and winning and losing hazards, so that his score kept rising, and Squire Luke raved.

Tom won every game, and his brother grew more silent, till quite in despair at the failure of his plan to put the squire in a good temper, Tom blurted out his business. He wanted a hundred pounds.

"I should think you do want a hundred pounds!" said the squire coolly; "say two."

"Two!" cried Tom merrily.

"Twopence!" cried his brother, driving his ball off the table with a tremendous clatter. "What for?"

"Meet a couple of bills," said Tom, picking up the ball. "No! Your play again."

"No business to accept them."

"Couldn't help it, old fellow. Come, let's have a hundred."

"Not a stiver."

"Why?"

"Because you've had your allowance for the year, and fifty over."

"Nonsense, old man; I'm hard pushed, and if I don't meet the bills, they'll be dishonoured."

"Well, what of that?" said Squire Luke coolly, as he made a stroke.

"What of it! eh? Why, the glorious name of Candlish will be dragged in the mire."

"Bah!" ejaculated the squire, playing again.

"Why, Luke, that stroke was not emblematic, was it, of your turning into a screw?"

"None of your hints. I put on no screw,

and I am no screw. You have your five hundred a year to spend, and I keep you besides."

"Oh, yes: and keep me well; but a man can't always keep just inside a certain line."

"You always keep outside a certain line," retorted the squire. "You have your five hundred regularly."

"And you have your five thousand regularly," said Tom, who was beginning to flush up.

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, it isn't fair that you should have all this big place and a large income, and I nearly nothing."

"That's right," said the squire; "abuse your father."

"I don't abuse my father!" retorted Tom hotly; "but I say it was an infernal shame!"

"He knew what a blackguard you are, Tommy. Ah! that's a good stroke: six!"

"Blackguard, eh? Come, I like that. Because I am open and above-board, and you are about the most underhanded ruffian

that ever lived, I'm a blackguard, and you are only Squire Luke. Why, you sneaking——"

"Don't call names, Tom," said the squire, laughing huskily, with his heavy face bloated and red from the wine he had taken. "Little boy, younger brother, if you are rude I may use the stick in the shape of a billiard cue."

"I only wish you would," said Tom, grinding his teeth as he played, striking the balls viciously, and scoring now every time.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" cried the squire; "going to win, are you? We shall see."

"Win? Curse the game! I could give you fifty out of a hundred, and beat you easily. Look here, are you going to let me have that money?"

"No, I am not; mind your play."

"Then I'll have it somehow."

"Burglary?"

"No; I'll make it so unpleasant for a certain person about some things I know that he shall be glad to lay down the hundred instead of lending it, as one brother should to another."

The squire's face grew dark, and the cue quivered in his grasp, as he gazed full at Tom Candlish, the brothers looking singularly alike in their anger. But the elder turned it off with a curious, unpleasant laugh, and leant over the table to make a stroke.

"Don't be a fool, Tom," he said, playing. "You always did have too much tongue."

"Too much or too little, I mean to use it more, instead of submitting to the tyranny of such a mean-spirited hound as you. What the old man could have been thinking of to leave the estate to such a miserly cur——"

"Mean-spirited hound! miserly cur, eh!" said the squire, between his teeth.

"Yes; and I repeat it," cried Tom Candlish, who was furious with disappointment. He found that humility was useless, and that now they had begun to quarrel, his only chance of getting money was by bullying and threats; so without heeding the gathering anger in his brother's eyes as he went on playing rapidly in turn and out of turn, he

kept up his attack. "What the governor could have been thinking of, I say——"

"Leave the governor alone, Tom," growled the squire. "He knew that if he left the money to me with the title, the estate would be kept out of the lawyers' hands, and the money would not be found in pretty women's laps."

"But down your throat, you sot!"

The squire looked up at him again, and he was going to make some furious retort, when the old butler's steps were heard ascending the flight of stairs, and he entered the room.

"Can I bring anything else, Sir Luke, before I go to bed?"

"No, Smith," said the squire; "what time is it?"

"Half-past ten, sir."

"All locked up? Servants gone to bed?"

"Yes, Sir Luke."

"That'll do, then, without Mr. Tom wants some more hot water."

"No; I'm in hot water enough," growled Tom, lighting a cigar, and the butler withdrew.

For some few minutes there was no sound but the click of the billiard balls, as the squire, forgetful entirely of the game, kept on knocking the red here, the white there, while Tom Candlish paced up and down, cue in hand, emitting regular puffs of smoke, as if he were some angry machine moved by an internal fire.

Doors were heard to shut here and there, and then all was silent in the old place save the regular pacing about of Tom, the squire's hasty tread, and the clicking of the billiard balls.

"Now, then!" cried Tom, at last; "are you going to let me have that money?"

"No," said the squire, coolly enough. "I wouldn't let you have it now for your bullying. I'm a hound and a cur, am I, my lad?"

"Yes, you are a despicable hound and a miserable cur, and if the old man had known——"

"Let the old man rest," said the squire, with a lurid look.

"I say, if the old man had known how

you were going to spend his money, sotting from morning to night——"

"He'd have left it to you to spend on the loose, eh?"

"Loose? Why, you are ten times as loose as I am; but you are so proud of your good name that you sneak about in the dark to do your dissipation. I am manly and straightforward in mine."

"Yes, you're a beauty," said the squire mockingly. "Which of those girls are you going to marry—Leo Salis or Dally Watlock?"

"You mind your own affairs, and leave me to manage mine!" said Tom Candlish fiercely.

"But I should like to know," said the squire, "because then I could arrange about the paper and furniture for the rooms."

"Do you want to quarrel, Luke?"

"Quarrel?" chuckled the squire; "not I. Trying to be brotherly and to make things pleasant. If it is to be Leo, of course we must have grays and sage greens and terra cottas. If it is to be Dally Watlock, we

must go in for red and yellow and purple. How delightful to have the sexton's granddaughter for a sister! I say, Tom, how happy we shall be!"

Tom Candlish turned upon his brother furiously, as if about to strike; and the squire, though apparently laughing over his banter, and about to play, kept upon his guard.

But no blow was struck. Tom uttered a low sound, like the muttering growl of an angry dog, and smoked quickly, giving the butt of his cue a thump down upon the floor from time to time as he walked.

"I shan't mind your marrying, Tom; and there's plenty of room for you to bring a wife to. I shan't marry, so your boy will get the title—and the coin."

"Coin?" cried Tom savagely; "there'll be none left. Do you think I don't know how you are spending it?"

"Never mind how I spend it, my lad. I only spend what is my own; and if I had spent all, I shouldn't come begging to you."

"Lucky for you," cried Tom Candlish

tauntingly. "Look here, Luke, how many years does it take a man to drink himself to death?"

"Don't know," said the squire, wincing.

"Well, you're hard at work, and I shall watch the experiment with some curiosity. I've a good chance."

"Healthier man than you, Tom; and it'll take me longer to kill myself than it will take you. I shall be a hale man long after you've broken your neck hunting."

"Look here!" cried Tom savagely, "once more: do you want to quarrel?"

"Not I," said the squire; "and I don't want to fight. Cain might kill Abel over again with an unlucky blow."

"'Pon my soul, Luke, if I could feel sure that Cain would be hung for it, I shouldn't mind playing Abel."

"Look at that!" cried the squire, as, after a random shot, the red ball went into one pocket, the white into another. "There's a shot!"

"Yes—a fluke," sneered Tom. "Your life has been a series of flukes. It was one that

you were born first, and another that you ever lived; while in earnest, as in play, it's always fluke, fluke, fluke!"

"Anchor flukes take fast hold of the ground, Tom," said the squire, with a sneering laugh.

"Yes, and of the money, too," cried Tom. "Come, I'll give you another chance. Will you let me have that cash?"

"No."

"Not to save me from a writ?"

"Who holds the bills?"

"That scoundrel Thompson. North's cousin."

"Then he'll worry you well for it," said the squire. "Let him. It'll be a lesson for you, and bring you to your senses. You'll be more careful."

"Nonsense! Let me have the money."

"I might have let you have it, and precious unwillingly, too," said the squire. "I might, I say, have let you have the money to save you for the last time, but your bullying tone, and the way in which you have spoken to me to-night, have quite

settled it. You may have writs and be arrested, and turn bankrupt if you like: it doesn't make any difference to me. Yes, it would; for perhaps I should get rid of you for a time."

"You cursed, mean, unbrotherly hound!" cried Tom furiously; and, throwing down the cue upon the table just as his brother was about to play, he swung out of the room, descended the stairs, and went up to his bedroom.

"Hang him!" muttered the squire, going to a side table and pouring himself out half a tumbler of strong brandy, which he diluted a little, and then drank off half at a draught. "I wish to goodness he'd go altogether. I won't pay his debts any more. That's not a bad stroke. How a drop of brandy does steady a man's hand! Let him swear and growl. Five hundred's enough for him for a year, and the old man was quite right."

He went on playing for another half-hour, practising strokes with very little success, till, glancing at his watch, he found it was close upon midnight, and placing his cue in

the rack, he poured himself out some more brandy, drank it, turned down the lamp, and was moving towards the baize swing-door, when it opened, and Tom Candlish stood in the opening.

"Hallo!" said the squire; "thought you'd gone to bed."

"What's the good of my going to bed with that money trouble to think about."

"Have some brandy? Make you forget it. I've left some on the table."

"No fooling, Luke. I was out of temper. I've been worried, and I said things I didn't mean."

"Always do. Here, let me come by. I want to go to bed."

"All right, you shall directly, old fellow; but you'll let me have that money?"

"Not a sou."

"I want it horribly; and it will save me no end of worry. You'll let me have it?"

"Not a sou, I tell you."

"Come, Luke, old chap, don't be hard upon me. I've been waiting patiently till I got cool, and you had finished playing, before

I came and spoke to you again. Now, then, it's only a hundred."

"And it'll be a hundred next week, and a hundred next month. I won't lend you a penny."

"Then, give it me. I've a right to some of the old man's coin."

"Not a sou, I tell you, and get out of my way. I want to go to bed."

"You'll help me, Luke?"

"No! Stand aside!"

"Come, don't be hard. I'm your brother."

"Worse luck!" said the squire, whose face was flushed by the brandy he had taken.

"Never mind that. Let me have the hundred."

"I tell you again, not a sou. Curse you! Will you let me come by?" cried the squire savagely; for the spirit had taken an awkward turn, and his face grew purple.

"Once more; will you let me have the money?"

"No!" roared the squire. "Get out of the way—dog!"

"Dog, yourself! Curse you for a mean hound!" cried Tom Candlish, with a savage look. "You don't go by here till you've given me a cheque."

The squire's temper was fully roused now. He had restrained it before; though, several times when he had uttered a low laugh and kept on handling his cue, his anger had been seething, and ready to brim over.

Now, at his brother's threat, that he should not pass until he had signed a cheque, he seized Tom by the shoulder as he blocked the way, and flung him aside.

Luke Candlish cleared the passage for his descent; but roused the evil in his brother, so that Tom closed with him in a fierce grip.

The struggle was almost momentary. There was a wrestling here and there, and then Luke Candlish put forth his whole strength as he practised a common Cornish trick, and Tom was thrown heavily upon the landing.

"There!" cried the squire; "lie there, you idiot! You'll get no cheque from me."

The squire had to pass over his brother's body to reach the stairs, and he was in the act of rapidly crossing him, when, with a desperate effort, Tom made a savage snatch at his leg.

The result was what might have been expected: the sudden check caused the squire to lose his balance, and he literally pitched head foremost down the stairs, to fall with a heavy crash at the bottom.

Tom Candlish rose to his hands and knees, and gazed at where his brother lay, just beneath the lamp in the lobby, head downwards, and in a curiously-awkward position for a living man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TERRIBLE SILENCE.

"SERVE him right," muttered Tom. Then rising and pushing the door, which had swung to, he entered the dark billiard-room, where he felt his way to the spirit stand, and took a hearty draught. "Curse him! he's as strong as a horse. I wish he had broken his neck."

The brandy gave him nerve, and he returned through the baize door into the light.

"Must lend him a hand, I suppose," he muttered, as he descended the stairs to where the squire lay in a heap, his head upon the mat, one leg doubled beneath him, and the other through the balustrade, which held it fast.

Tom Candlish stood peering down at him for a few moments, and then, as his brother did not move, he stooped towards him.

"Here," he said roughly, as he took hold of his wrist; "don't lie like that; you'll have a blood-vessel burst."

There was no reply; and, as the wrist was loosed, the arm fell in an absolutely nerveless way.

"Here, Luke!" he cried; "get up. Don't fool. Get up, man!"

Still no reply, and, beginning to be startled, Tom Candlish went down upon one knee and tried to move his brother's head into a more comfortable position.

As he did so, the light fell athwart so ghastly and strange a countenance, from whose lips the blood was slowly trickling, that he let the head glide from his hands, for it to sink suddenly with a dull thud upon the stairs.

"Good God!" ejaculated the young man, in a low, excited voice. "Here, Luke! Luke, old man: hold up!"

There was no movement—not even a sigh;

and Tom Candlish ran to alarm the house; but, as he reached the swing-door at the end of the passage, and stood gazing into the hall, he stopped and ran back to lay his hand upon his brother's heart; then caught his wrist, and afterwards thrust a hand right into his breast, but only to withdraw it quite aghast.

"Here! a doctor!" he gasped, his voice being like a hoarse whisper. "Smith! Somebody! Here!"

He rose and hurried to the door leading into the entrance hall once more, but stopped again as he reached it, and stood gazing back at the distorted figure at the foot of the stairs.

Then he turned and looked up the dimly-lit staircase, but all was perfectly still. No one appeared to have heard the altercation or the fall. All seemed to be sleeping; and, panting heavily, as wild thoughts full of wonder and dread flooded his brain, Tom Candlish closed the door softly, ran back along the passage, ascended the stairs, and gained the billiard-room, where he groped his

way once more to the spirit stand, removed the stopper, and drank heavily from the brandy decanter.

"Hah!" he ejaculated, as he took a long breath, and turned to see that the oval pane in the baize door seemed to have assumed the aspect of a huge, dull eye glaring at him.

"Am I going mad?" he muttered, as he staggered to the door. "I must call help; perhaps—perhaps—he is seriously hurt."

He stole softly down the stairs, and paused by the prostrate figure, still lying perfectly motionless, and in its hideously-distorted position.

"I must call help—call help!" whispered the young man, whose face was now ghastly; but though there were bells that might have been rung and people were within call, he only crept along the passage, without attempting to touch the fallen man, pushed the spring-door gently, so that it should make no noise, closed it again, stood listening, and then, in the midst of the dead silence, stole on tip-toe up the grand stair-

case to his bedroom, where he once more stopped to listen, and then crept softly in and closed the door.

The silence in the old Hall was as that of death for a few moments, before it was broken by a faint click, as of the bolt of a lock just shot.

Once more silence, and then on the dim staircase there was a musical purring noise, followed by the pleasant chimes of a clock, which rang out the half-hour after midnight.

Then once again the stillness as of death.

CHAPTER XXV.

SMITH FINDS SOMETHING WRONG.

"You heard nothing?" said the doctor.

"Nothing at all. I went to bed at the usual time, sir," said the butler—"half-past ten—yes, sir, I've the chaise waiting; won't you come in that, and I can tell you as we drive over?"

"Yes; all right," said the doctor, and five minutes later they were rattling along the road towards the Hall.

"Now, go on," said North.

"Yes, sir; I went to bed as usual, and slept very soundly till about an hour ago, and then I suddenly woke. I don't know what made me wake; but I did, and somehow began thinking, as I've often thought

before, about the plate in the pantry, and whether it was safe."

"Don't you sleep in the pantry?"

"No, sir; it's so damp. So I lay telling myself it was all nonsense and fancy; but the more I thought so, the more uncomfortable I grew, till I could stand it no longer, and I got up, slipped on my trousers and great-coat, and went to the top of the stairs, where I felt quite a chill, as I knew something was not as it should be, for the lamp was not turned out on the hall table."

"What lamp?"

"The hall lamp that Sir Luke always puts out himself when he goes up to bed."

"Where do you say you left him last night?"

"In the billiard-room, sir, playing with Mr. Tom, sir."

"Yes; go on."

"So I went down, sir; and there saw through the baize door that the lamp was burning at the end of the passage at the foot of the billiard-room stairs."

"Yes."

"And as soon as I got through the baize door, there, under the lamp, lay my poor master, all like of a heap."

"What did you do?"

"Ran to him, and tried to put him in a more comfortable position, sir; but——"

"Yes; I understand."

"Then I rushed up and called Mr. Tom, sir; and we went to the squire together, and rang the bells and alarmed the house. Then, as soon as the boy had put the horse in the chaise, sir, I drove over to fetch you."

"But did you do nothing to try and revive him?"

"Oh! yes, sir; but——"

"I understand," said the doctor. "And Mr. Tom?"

"He couldn't believe it, sir. He said he played billiards with the squire for some time, and then grew tired and went to bed, leaving him knocking the balls about, and it's all very plain, sir. I tell you of course, though I wouldn't say so to another soul, poor Sir Luke used to take a great deal too much. I

filled the spirit stand only this morning, and the brandy decanter was quite empty. He had a deal too, at dinner, before."

"And you think he pitched downstairs, Smith?"

"Yes, sir; that is my belief," said the butler; "and Mr. Tom seemed to think so too."

They reached the Hall to find every one in a state of the most intense excitement, but an ominous silence reigning through the place.

"Thank goodness you've come at last," cried a familiar voice, and Tom hurried to meet North. "Pray be quick; he is insensible still."

The doctor looked at the young man curiously.

"Where is he?"

"We carried him into the dining-room, and laid him on a sofa; but he has not stirred since. I'm afraid something is broken."

As he spoke he led North into the dining-room, where the candles were burning, the

shutters were closed, and curtains drawn; and there, upon a couch in the middle of the room, lay Sir Luke Candlish, as his brother had said, without having moved since he had been borne carefully in.

The doctor's examination was short, and Tom Candlish stood looking on, apparently too much overcome to speak.

"Well," he said at last, "is he very bad? Is anything broken?"

The doctor raised his eyebrows, and could have replied "his neck," but he said simply: "Bad, sir? Can you not see that he is dead?"

"Dead?" ejaculated Tom; and his jaw dropped, while his face assumed a look of intense horror.

"Yes, sir. The butler's theory seems to be quite correct. Sir Luke must have pitched headlong from the top of the stairs to the bottom."

"And there is no hope?"

The doctor shook his head, and laid his hand upon the young man's arm, signing to him to quit the room.

Tom followed mechanically.

"So horrible!" he said, as soon as they were in the drawing-room. "We were playing billiards together till late last night, while now—— Yes, what is it?"

"I beg pardon, *Sir Thomas*," said the old butler softly, "the housekeeper said would you and Dr. North like a cup of tea?"

"Sir Thomas!" The title made Tom Candlish thrill as he stood gazing at the speaker. So soon! *Le Roi est mort! Vive le Roi!*

He was Sir Thomas Candlish. The estate was his and the rent-roll of at least five thousand a year. Last night he was enraged at the possibility of trouble arising from Thompson. Now he was a free man: he was rich.

And his brother?

It was his secret. And why should he trouble about the sudden death? It was an accident, and his own counsel could easily be kept. There was none to reveal the truth. The dead could never speak.

As he mused like this, and the butler

brought in the tea, Dr. North was lost in a fit of musing, for, like a flash, the scientific fancy upon which he had so long pondered came to him, so that for the moment he stood breathless and gazing wildly at the door which seemed to open before him.

The idea was bewildering. Leo had bidden her suitor distinguish himself as the price at which her love was to be won; and the more he thought, the more the idea shone out, dazzling him by its intense light—shining into the dark places of his soul.

What was his theory? That if a hale, hearty man were suddenly cut off by some accident, and apparently dead, could he arrest decay, Nature herself would repair the injury done, even as a fractured bone rapidly knits together and becomes stronger than before.

Here, then, was a hale, hearty man suddenly cut down; he was the medical man in attendance, and the opportunity served for restoring this man to life. Why should he not make his first essay now?

The idea grew more terrible in its intensity hour by hour. It was his chance if he would grasp it. Impious? No, not more so than performing an operation or trying to save a sufferer from death. But he was dead.

"What we call dead," muttered North; "but why not suspended animation? For her sake, for my own fame, to achieve a success such as the world has not heard of before, I must—I will make the essay."

"But how?"

"And suppose I make him live once more—what then?"

The idea blinded him, and he covered his eyes to think.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"AH!"

"How horrible!" the curate said, when he heard the news from North, who came in at breakfast time.

As he spoke these words, Leo entered the room, and stopped short, gazing from one to the other.

She had come down looking happy and contented, with a satisfied smile upon her curved lips, heightened by a rather mocking light which danced in her eyes, as they encountered those of the doctor. There was a feeling of triumph, the satisfaction of a vain, weak woman at the sight of the slave ready to cast himself at her feet, and her manner was coquettish as she held out her hand.

But her brother's ejaculation, the stern look on the doctor's face, chilled her, and

she stopped short, looking from one to the other, her lips parting as if for the utterance of words which would not come.

"What is it?" she said at last, wildly. "What is horrible?"

"Hush, Leo!" said the curate, taking her hand; "don't be alarmed."

"But you said——"

"Yes; North has brought in terrible news from the Hall."

Leo's face turned ghastly, and she clung to her brother, while North hurriedly placed a chair, into which she sank, but only to sit up rigidly, as she stared with widely opened eyes at the doctor.

"Be calm," he said tenderly. "You are still weak."

"What is it?" she said, in a voice that did not sound like her own.

"It would be better that you should not know," said North. "There has been a sad accident at the Hall."

"I must know now," panted Leo, as she opened and closed her hands in her excitement.

"It would be better to speak," said the

curate. "My sisters have been schooled to trouble, North. There has been a terribly sudden calamity at the Hall, Leo, dear. North was called up in the night, and——"

"Is he dead?" she whispered hoarsely; and then reading her answer in the eyes of both, she uttered a long, low, "Ah!" and sat with her hand tightening upon her brother's, while she closed her eyes, and an agonising spasm seemed to contract her beautiful face.

"A fit of giddiness seems to have seized Sir Luke, and he fell headlong from the top of the stairs to the bottom."

"Ah!"

Once more that strange expiration of the breath, which sounded to the listeners precisely the same, for their senses were not attuned with sufficient keenness to detect the difference.

"I am sorry to have given you this terrible shock, Leo," said North tenderly; "but I felt bound to come and let Salis know."

She did not reply directly, but sat there spasmodically clinging to her brother's hand with fingers that were damp and cold.

"I am better now," she said at last, in a low whisper. "It is very terrible. Does Mary know?"

"Not yet," said Salis. "I am going to fetch her down. Has the faintness passed away?"

"Yes—yes!" she said hastily. "It was the suddenness of the news. Try not to startle Mary, Hartley; but she is not such a coward as I am."

"You have been so ill," said North tenderly. "Your nerves are unstrung. Besides, it is a great shock to hear of so awfully sudden a death."

"Go and tell Mary," said Leo, rising. "I am quite well now. Speak gently."

"Yes," said the curate; and he left the room.

"Tell me," said Leo, as soon as the door closed. "How was it? Was there any quarrel? It was an accident?"

She spoke in a hurriedly excited manner, and there was a wildly anxious look in her eyes.

"You are excited," said North, taking

her hand, half professionally, half with the anxious touch of a lover; but she snatched it away with an angry flash from her eyes.

She saw his pained look, and held out her hand the next moment.

"If the pulse beats quickly," she said, smiling, "it is no wonder."

"No, no, of course not," he cried, taking her hand, and holding it in his.

"Now, tell me."

"Oh, it was an accident," he said, "undoubtedly. I'm afraid there was a reason for it."

Leo was silent, looking at North searchingly.

"Oh, yes, I understand now," she said quickly. "He drank very much, did he not?"

"I'm afraid so," replied North, feeling half troubled at the intimate knowledge displayed by the woman he loved.

"It is very horrible," said Leo, closing her eyes. "Hush! they are coming down. Say as little as you can. Mary is very weak."

For the curate's heavy step was heard upon the stairs, and directly after, as North hastened to open the door, Salis entered,

carrying Mary in his arms, she looking white and anxious, and gazing quickly from her sister to North and back.

There was an interchange of glances all round, and then, as if by common consent, the subject of the past night was avoided for a time, and North turned to go.

"But you will stay breakfast?" said Mary. "You look tired and worn out."

She coloured slightly, for the words, full of anxiety for North's welfare, had escaped her inadvertently; and the colour deepened as, in his pleasantly frank way, he smiled in her face.

"It is very good of you," he said. "You are always so thoughtful. If Leo will only endorse the invitation, I shall be very glad to stay."

"I'm sure we shall be very pleased," said Leo calmly; and he crossed to her side, bent down, and said, in low tone:

"I like that."

"You like what?" she said coolly enough.

"The brave way in which you have mastered your weakness."

She smiled and looked furtively at her sister, who was less successful in controlling her feelings.

The breakfast passed over without further allusion to the catastrophe at the Hall till towards the end, when Salis said suddenly:

"I have a very unpleasant duty to perform."

Mary looked up anxiously.

"Yes, dear; I must go over and see Thomas Candlish."

Leo bent over her cup.

"It is a duty that I must fulfil, North."

"Yes," said the doctor gravely; "especially at a time like this."

"How horrible!"

And when the doctor left soon after, and he shook hands with his friend again, the latter once more exclaimed:

"How horrible!"

But it was in allusion to the sudden termination of the career of a man who drank heavily, and there was no *arrière pensée* as to the possibility of a quarrel between the two young men.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DOCTOR'S OPPORTUNITY.

About midday, on his return from visiting his patients, North looked rather black.

Perhaps it was the reflection from the sleek, superfine garments of his cousin, for that gentleman was walking slowly up and down on the lawn in front of the old Manor House, and in no way adding to the attractions of the quaintly-cut, well-kept place.

"You here, Thompson!"

"Yes, my dear Horace; I had to come down on business to-day, and I thought you would give me a bit of lunch before I went on."

"To see Mrs. Berens?"

"Well—er—perhaps I may give her a

call; but my business was with—dear me, how strange that you should take any interest in social matters that have nothing to do with the body!"

"Am I such a very eccentric man, then, that I should study my profession hard?"

"Not at all, my dear fellow—not at all. I study mine hard, my dear Horace. Left almost penniless, it was a necessity, and I have, I am proud to say, been very successful, and am practically independent. But my visit here to-day was not to see the handsome widow—there, don't blush, old fellow."

"Don't be a fool, Thompson," said the doctor testily. "Now, then, what were you going to say?"

"I was going to tell you that my visit would be to the Hall."

"To the Hall?" cried North excitedly.

"Yes. Here, what's the matter?" said Cousin Thompson excitedly. "He hasn't given me the slip?"

"If you mean Sir Luke Candlish——"

"No," said Thompson harshly; "I don't

mean Luke Candlish. Here, why don't you speak, man? Has Tom Candlish gone?"

"No; he is at the Hall; but——"

"That's all right, then," said Cousin Thompson, drawing a breath of relief. "Oh, I see, you've been over."

"Yes, I have been over."

"And he is shamming illness again because he expected me to-day. But it won't do, Horace—it won't do. Come, now, he's quite well, isn't he? Don't turn against your own cousin, and back him up."

"Tom Candlish is as well as a man can be under such horrible circumstances. His brother is dead."

"Phew!" whistled the lawyer—a long-drawn, low, deep whistle. "Then he is now Sir Thomas Candlish."

"Yes, and if you have lent him money at usury it will be all right."

"At usury!" snarled the lawyer; "don't you be so fond of using that word. I must make money, and lending at interest is fair enough."

"Where are you going?"

"Going down to the Hall at once."

"You said you had come to lunch."

"Hang your lunch! I must see Tom Candlish."

"Impossible. It would not be decent to go on business now."

"Decent or indecent, I must see him at once."

"My cousin; and how cordially I do dislike him!" muttered the doctor, as he watched the sleek, black back of his visitor as he went down towards the gate. "To go at a time like this! Well, thank goodness, I am not a money-grubber."

He sat down in his study, and took a manuscript book from his drawer. Over this book he began to pore, but the words danced before his eyes, and he could think of nothing but Luke Candlish, the hale, strong man, suddenly cut off by accident, and of Leo's words bidding him distinguish himself.

"No rest last night," he said, throwing the book back into the drawer; "I can't read, or think, or do anything."

"Are you ready for your lunch, sir?" said

Mrs. Milt. "Mr. Thompson will join you, I suppose?"

"No; but I dare say he will come to dinner."

"Ho! Lunch is quite ready, sir," said the old lady, in an ill-used tone, as the doctor moved towards the door.

"Never mind; I can't eat to-day. Going out," said North hastily; and he hurriedly left the house, and passed down the village, where every one was discussing the accident at the Hall, and longed to question him, if such a thing could have been ventured upon.

He had not seen Moredock for two or three days, and almost immediately, to avoid the torture of his thoughts, and what was rapidly approaching the stage of a great temptation, he walked to the old sexton's cottage.

The door was ajar, and he tapped, but there was no reply, and the only sound within was the regular beat of the great clock as the heavy pendulum swung to and fro.

"Asleep, perhaps," he said to himself, and

pushing the door, he walked in; but the big arm-chair was vacant, and after a glance round, in which his eyes rested for a moment upon the old carved oak coffer, the doctor went slowly out, and, without considering which way he should go, walked straight on towards the church.

A sound, as of something falling, made him raise his eyes, and he saw that the chancel door was open.

"What's Salis doing there?" he said to himself; and, entering the gate, he walked up the steps to the open doorway.

"You here, Salis?" he said.

"Nay, sir," came back, in a harsh, familiar tone; "parson's been and gone. Things is looking up again, doctor."

"Looking up?"

"Ay. Been trebble quiet lately: only a bit of a child as hasn't been chrissen' this month past. Horrible healthy place, Dook's Hampton."

"What are you doing here?"

"Doing? Here? Why, haven't you heard as the young squire—why, of course you

have; you were called up this morning. Well, he's got to be buried, hasn't he?"

"Buried? Yes, of course," said the doctor thoughtfully.

"Yes; he's got to be buried," said Moredock. "Some says it arn't decent and like Christians, as ought to be buried tight in the brown earth. But they don't know, doctor. They can't tell what a lot o' water there is in the ground o' winters. I know, and I know what 'matics is. Nobody knows how damp that there churchyard is better than I do, doctor."

North stood looking at the sexton, but his thoughts were far away.

"Ay, Squire Luke'll be buried in the morslem—he'll lie with his fathers, as Scripter says; and when I die, which won't be this twenty year, that's how I'd like to lie with my fathers. Stretched out nice and warm in his lead coffin, that's how he's going to be, and put on a nice dry shelf. Ay, it's a nasty damp old churchyard, doctor, and well they folk in Church Row know it. He, he, he! their wells is allus

full o' nice clean water, but I allus goes to the fur pump."

North did not seem to hear a word, but stood holding on by the rail of the Candlish tomb, thinking. His head swam with the dazzling light that blazed into his understanding. He was confused, and full of wonder, hesitation, and doubt.

Luke Candlish—dead—the mausoleum—the hale, hearty young man—struck down.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated; "has my opportunity come—at last?"

END OF VOL. I.

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